

BECOMING FULLY FREE: A MODEL FOR HOW THE
CHURCH CAN MENTOR EX-OFFENDERS
THROUGH THE RE-ENTRY PROCESS

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ABSTRACT

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My project context is Union Baptist Church in Zanesville, Ohio. The problem in this context is there is no organized ministry in place to help newly released offenders reintegrate back into the community. If our church leadership would be willing to be trained in mentoring ex-offenders, then they would be equipped to help guide them toward successful reintegration. This project consisted of six weeks of teaching the senior leaders about mentoring, returning citizens issues, and informing them about re-entry issues in the context. Methodologies employed were group discussions, focused journaling, and pre-project and post-project surveys.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

T This work has been a labor of love over hate, hope, disappointment, courage, and fear. I wish I could say that the love, hope, and courage were within me and kept me focused to the end. However, that is not the case. Many people have contributed of themselves to bring me to this point in my life.

To the staff and faculty of United Theological Seminary, thank you for pouring into my life. It did not matter if you taught a class or helped a confused student with financial aid, or technology issues. You guys' rock! To my mentors, Dr. Lucius Dalton, Dr. Carl Solomon, and Bishop Dr. Lisa Weah and our faculty consultants Dr. Rychie Bridenstein and Dr. Kevin Taylor, thank you for not giving up on me. Thank you to my peers in the cohort, The Harold Hudson Scholars. Your fellowship has been a blessing.

To my editor Lori Spears and her team, you all are life savers! To the members of Union Baptist Church in Zanesville, Ohio, from the first day we walked into the door, you opened your hearts to us. We are not just pastor and people. We are fellow laborers and fellow travelers on this road from earth to heaven.

To my wife of over forty years, Debra, you were with me many years ago when I walked out of a college orientation meeting saying that I was too old to even think about finishing college. Your encouragement took me back to that classroom, and to all the classrooms since then. You have been my friend, confidant, my motivator, and my

taskmaster. When I gave up, you refused to give up on me. Your love and patience have kept me going.

To Dr. Harold Hudson, Dr. Marvin Miller, Bishop Donald James Washington and all the pastors of the Baptist Pastor's Conference of Columbus and Vicinity, thank you for your support. To all the incarcerated men and women, I have met and tried to help on this journey, you are the reason why this project became a reality.

Finally, I give thanks and praise to God through Jesus Christ who has let me see this day. You whispered in my ear on New Year's Day 2009 and told me to finish my education. Little did I know that prompting would take me to this point. All I can do is bow my head and say, "Thank you, Lord!"

DEDICATION

This research is dedicated to the re-entry community that is committed to seeing returning citizens become positive members of the community.

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INTRODUCTION

Many years ago, back in the 1980s before I became an employee of the prison system, I was involved in prison ministry through my church community. I went to various prisons, jails, and juvenile facilities at the invitation of the chaplains, to teach Bible studies and to counsel the inmates. I remember one day after a Bible study I was talking with one of the participants an older man who was days from being released. I asked him if he was glad to be leaving prison. He said that he was but that he was afraid to leave because the world had changed so much since he had been locked up. At the time, I was surprised by his confession. I thought, "Man if that was me, I would be so glad to be getting out of here!" Almost forty years later, eighteen of which I spent as a case manager in the system that he left years before, I can understand why he felt that way.

For many, the prospect of freedom is more frightening than being incarcerated. This is because of the uncertainty of their existence outside the walls of the institution. For those who have spent considerable time behind bars going home means going to a strange place, where many of the familiar people have gotten older, some have passed away, and the children that were small when they left are now grown, many with families of their own. For others, the environment they return to is the same as when they left, and that is part of the problem. The same people, involved in the same criminal activities, or

tolerant of criminal activity, living hand-to mouth with little to offer in rehabilitative or pro-social activities.

In recent years, there has been a shift in the criminal justice system away from retributive punishment toward more rehabilitative action. Concepts like reentry and restorative justice have been moving to the forefront of discussions and policy initiatives. Along with this shift has come the recognition that faith-based organizations are in the best position to facilitate the return of formerly incarcerated people back to their communities with an emphasis on being a source of community connection and role modeling to keep them out of prison and on the path to productive participation in the community. Many of the faith-based organizations efforts have been limited to providing religious services and programs held within the prison itself. With few exceptions, little has been done to meet the social, emotional, and spiritual needs of individuals once they leave the institution.

It is the purpose of this work to present an alternative. The argument is that if the members of a local congregation are willing to receive training, then they will be equipped and more willing to engage with returning citizens on a personal level and supply mentoring and modeling of pro-social behavior that will help guide them to make better decisions and deter them from continuing in the negative thinking and actions that led to their incarceration.

The context for this work is the local church, supported by the biblical text Matthew 25:31-46 which states:

When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left. Then the

king will say to those at his right hand, ‘Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.’ Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?’ And the king will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.’ Then he will say to those at his left hand, ‘You that are accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not give me clothing, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.’ Then they also will answer, ‘Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not take care of you?’ Then he will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.’ And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.¹

In chapter one, the context and the inspiration of this work is discussed. Additionally, chapter one provides synergy between the ministry focus and the research project.

Chapter two focuses more extensively with the biblical text, going into more detail about God’s injunction to the people of God to “visit the prisoner.” There is a discussion about the Jewish concept of Tikkun Olam and how that concept has relevance to this project.

Chapter three focuses on the historical connection between the research topic and Frederick Brotherton Meyer. Meyers was a nineteenth century Baptist preacher and reformer in Great Britain who assisted in changing thousands of lives of returning citizens into society. Chapter four sheds light on the Social Gospel and the influence that men like Walter Rauschenbusch and Washington Gladden had as it relates to prison reform and reentry. Chapter five informs the reader of the topic Restorative Justice, a

¹ Biblical citations are from the New Revised Standard Version unless otherwise noted, Matthew 25:31-46.

movement in the criminal justice field. Restorative Justice moves the justice system from institutionalized punishment to a more comprehensive community involved approach.

Chapter six highlights the project that was developed, its implementation within the ministry context, the findings of the study and implications for future work in this area.

CHAPTER ONE

MINISTRY FOCUS

As I reflect on the ministry context that I have been blessed to serve, and as I contemplate the particular gifts, talents, strengths, and weakness that make up my total being, I must give God thanks for making me and bringing me to this ministry “for such a time as this.” I was called to a city that suffered much and trying to get back on its feet. I am called to a people that have the heart to do great things and only need the direction, inspiration, and access to adequate resources. I spoke about re-imagining church in a paper I wrote prior to the Spiritual Autobiography. What is meant by re-imagining the church is that doing “church as usual” will not reach the masses as in generations prior, and many movements that were started after – in my opinion – are not focused on reaching the “least, the lost, or the left behind.” The question becomes, how do we re-imagine church to reach out and positively impact a segment of our society that had been marginalized for so long?

These thoughts caused other thoughts, such as what pressing causes, issues, or needs can we identify as potential opportunities for us to get involved in that minister to the community? To be sure, the people at Union are not lazy or afraid to reach out. We pass out toys and food during the Christmas holidays and will continue to do so. In fact, starting the third Sunday in January, we will begin the fundraising to help needy families for future Christmas outreach projects. This carries on the legacy of Union Baptist

Church since its early days, where the church was a beacon in the community and constantly raised money to help those in need. Due to this legacy, I have constantly reminded this congregation that God did not plant this church right in the downtown area and keep it here all these years for nothing. God must have a plan to keep us around for almost 200 years. What did the church do in those days when it was a significant influence in people's lives? It was a community. People were part of the church because it gave people the feeling of belonging. The networks established within the church walls added to the spiritual well-being of its members and aided in their social, cultural, and financial well-being.

Proctor writes, "Church was a time to compare clothes, exchange news, share a sad note, celebrate a new job, look for a partner in romance, exchange recipes, learn about bargains, or pick up the name of a better doctor, tailor, or automobile mechanic."¹ Church in the twenty-first century is much different from church just fifty or sixty years ago. Today, the faith "community" is not relegated to a specific geographical area, nor does it encompass as distinctive a cultural, socioeconomic, racial, or ethnic identity as in the past. In my city, even though it is a historically predominately Black church located downtown and surrounded by predominately White churches, Union Baptist succeeds in attracting White and Black people, well-to-do and not-so-well to do. People come from the poor south side and the more prosperous north side. For years, the downtown area had been all but shut down as far as retail attractions go. This has caused foot traffic on the weekends to be almost non-existent. In the recent past, fine hotels, restaurants, and retail businesses made the area an attraction for people on the weekends. Many people who

¹ Samuel Dewitt Proctor, *The Substance of Things Hoped For: A Memoir of African American Faith* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1999), 16.

came to shop in the area also discovered churches that could meet the spiritual needs of the community.

Recently, there has been activity in the area that includes retail businesses either reopening or relocating to the area. This could be a benefit to all the churches in the area. The increase of people coming into the downtown area on the weekends would give all the churches more exposure. Exposure, however, is not ministry. The most relevant issue for my ministry context is not how many bodies we can get inside the building on Sunday morning, but how many people we can impact, how many relationships we can build, and how many people we can meaningfully engage in the journey of transformation. Craig Van Gelder states the church:

Is a community created by the Spirit and that it has a unique nature, or essence, which gives it a unique identity. In light of the church's nature, the missional conversation then explores what the church does. Purpose and strategy are not unimportant in the missional conversation, but they are understood to be derivative dimensions of understanding the nature, or essence of the church. Likewise, changing cultural contexts are not unimportant, but they are understood to be conditions that the church interacts with in light of its nature or essence.²

The issue, then, is not a matter of what we do or how we do it, but of why we do what we do. The motto for our church is "Loving God and Serving Others." The first part of this motto describes the reason for our continued existence because we live to love God, and that is the core of our church. Relationship with God is the priority of our community of believers. Out of that relationship comes service to others, which includes all races, creeds, status, orientations, and beliefs or lack thereof. Our mission is to engage everyone with the love of God and to find ways to be of service.

² Craig Van Gelder, *The Ministry of the Missional Church: A Community Led by the Spirit* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2007), 17.

Previously, I examined my journey to the place of service that I now hold. Also, I examined the ministry context that I am presently involved in. I examined the cultural, economic, and demographic information about the city and the people of Zanesville, Ohio. To review information about the area that I serve, Zanesville is one of the larger towns known as Appalachia. This region is primarily rural, with high rates of poverty. The city of Zanesville completed a comprehensive plan for the area that concluded:

Zanesville has been experiencing high levels of poverty for the last three decades. The level of poverty in Zanesville has remained relatively consistent from 1989 to 2013, hovering between 25.9% and 29.7%. The statewide average was at 15.8% in 2013; roughly, half of what it is in Zanesville. Overall, 13% of people in Appalachian Ohio live below the federal poverty line. Zanesville is on par for poverty increase compared with the state average, and below the increase the sample average has experienced since the recession.³

Unemployment, insufficient access to adequate healthcare, low median income, and substandard housing are other areas the study identified as problematic issues for the city.⁴ Based on these statistics, many issues can be addressed by this doctoral project. Addressing some of the issues facing the city and the people has been a recurring theme for Union Baptist Church for most of its existence.

A significant feature of the history of this church is that the people were constantly involved in efforts to help the less fortunate. These efforts were most acutely evident where the church has been recognized as one of the entities that helped those escaping the evil that was slavery. This church stood against this blight on our national history by becoming one of the helping agencies that shuttled people of color as they fled

³ City of Zanesville, "City of Zanesville Comprehensive Plan 2016," City of Zanesville <http://www.coz.org/wp-content/uploads/City-of-Zanesville-Comp-Plan-Final.pdf>.

⁴ City of Zanesville, "City of Zanesville Comprehensive Plan 2016," <http://www.coz.org/wp-content/uploads/City-of-Zanesville-Comp-Plan-Final.pdf>.

involuntary servitude in the southern states via the Underground Railroad and assisted them in settling in the relative safety of the north. Many of these souls, Union Baptist, helped to reach all the way to Canada. The church was part of a network of individuals and organizations both, Black and White, that stood against the immorality of slavery with decisive action. This activism and social consciousness were grounded in the biblical mandate that God's people ought to "...do justice, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God" (Micah 6:8).

In considering how the congregation of Union Baptist should engage in meaningful ministry, it is important to understand their organizational structure. Van Gelder notes there are two structure models, closed and open.⁵ Closed systems deal with organizations from within with little regard for their context or environment. A church operating in a closed system may approach transition and decline by such means as searching for a new pastor to re-kindle the "glory days" of the church's past. It may search for ways of developing internal ministries like small groups to increase member participation and commitment, creating service ministries within the evolving community, but lacking engagement with the people in the community to integrate them into the life and membership of the congregation, or focusing on a wider net by trying to reach people in the region who would be willing to drive from farther away to participate. This would also include using social media platforms to allow people to view the services, participate in studies, and even give financially, all without developing deep and consequential relationships.

⁵ Gelder, *The Ministry of the Missional Church*, 128-152.

Open organizational structures differ in that the business or congregation is in a dynamic relationship with its context. In this model, the beginning point is the context in which the church exists. Congregations need to know of the available resources within their community from which they can draw the resources to carry out the mission of God. The two questions to ask are 1) What is God doing? 2) What does God want to do?

As a church ascertains the resources needed for an impactful mission, the congregations should also be clarifying its purpose. While it is true that every church should be a beacon of hope, love, and service to a community while pointing the way to forgiveness and redemption, it is also true that the carrying out of this mandate is different depending on each church's context. All churches should be guided by the Holy Spirit and scripture when focusing on their purpose. Also, there are key practices that mission-oriented churches should focus on. First, there is worship, which includes the Word of God and the sacraments, education, and discipleship, care and fellowship, service, and witness.⁶

Vision is also important when discerning what God wants to do with the community of faith. Many pastors struggle with this aspect of the mission. Some feel that they may not have a vision for their congregations. Others may feel that their vision is too great for their current context. The truth is that casting vision is a skill that can be developed through prayer and study of scripture and in being familiar with the issues faced in that environment. Vision looks to the future. It is the congregation looking forward to where God wants to go. Many churches have stalled in their witness and work simply because their attention is focused more on the past than in the present and future.

⁶ Gelder, *The Ministry of the Missional Church*, 147.

Now, we have an opportunity to impact a segment of our society that has been overlooked and underserved. The question is, given the magnitude of the various needs in the area and given the small numbers in our church, not to mention the smallness of our budget, what project can have the most lasting impact in our community and open up more avenues for meaningful ministry?

I recently re-read Martin Luther King's last article, published posthumously in the book "A Testament of Hope." In the article, King called for Whites and Blacks to unite to fight for and obtain social justice and basic human rights. He writes, "...the Black man in America can provide a new soul force for all Americans, a new expression of the American dream that need not be realized at the expense of other men around the world, but a dream of opportunity and life that can be shared with the rest of the world."⁷ This collaboration between Black and White, rich and poor, highly educated and poorly educated, all united for the common good is described by King as the "beloved community." This community rests on the three pillars of justice, equal opportunity, and love toward all human beings. The concept emphasizes the interdependence of humanity. King said, "Let us be dissatisfied until rat-infested, vermin-filled slums will be a thing of a dark past and every family will have a decent sanitary house in which to live. Let us be dissatisfied until the empty stomachs of Mississippi are filled and the idle industries of Appalachia are revitalized."⁸ It was King's view and the view of many since then that the church should stand for more than numerical growth or material prosperity, but that

⁷ James M. Washington, ed., *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr.* (New York, NY: Harper Collins, 1986), 323.

⁸ Martin Luther King Jr., "Honoring Dubois," US History, <http://www.ushistory.org/documents/dubois.htm>.

Christians have an obligation to love the stranger and to do good to all people. If this is the legacy of Union Baptist Church, it must also be its future.

In the Gospel according to Matthew, chapter twenty-five, Jesus speaks about the charge his disciples must minister to what he refers to as “the least of these my brethren.” In this passage, Jesus describes those who minister to the poor, the hungry, the needy, and those who are in prisons. Jesus declares to his followers that if they are actively engaged in helping those who cannot help themselves, it is like them serving him. The message is clear: Christians have an obligation to show love and extend community to those who have fallen outside the mainstream and have been forgotten or neglected. One of those that Jesus mentions as being worthy of time and effort is those in prison. Jesus says that the disciples have to “visit” them. This means more than just going to the jailhouse, sitting with inmates for a while, just passing the time of day. It means to come alongside someone and help them through the process of both incarceration and their eventual release. According to the Bureau of Justice statistics, 95% of all inmates incarcerated at the state level will eventually be released. Many of them will be returning to the environments that were partially the cause of their incarceration. While it is true that each person can resist the temptation to commit crimes, many see that kind of lifestyle as their only option for survival. This leaves them caught in a vicious cycle of failure and criminal behavior that some have coined the “cradle to prison pipeline.”

Michelle Alexander argues that:

What is completely missed in the rare public debates today about the plight of African Americans is that a huge percentage of them are not free to move up at all. It is not just that they lack opportunity, attend poor schools, or are plagued by poverty. They are barred by law from doing so. And the major institutions with which they come into contact are designed to prevent their mobility. To put the matter starkly: The current system of control permanently locks a huge percentage

of the African American community out of the mainstream society and economy. The system operates through our criminal justice institutions, but it functions more like a caste system than a system of crime control. Viewed from this perspective, the so-called underclass is better understood as an under caste—a lower caste of individuals who are permanently barred by law and custom from mainstream society. Although this new system of racialized social control purports to be colorblind, it creates and maintains racial hierarchy much as earlier systems of control did. Like Jim Crow (and slavery), mass incarceration operates as a tightly networked system of laws, policies, customs, and institutions that operate collectively to ensure the subordinate status of a group defined largely by race.⁹

I would posit that not only does the system of mass incarceration create a permanent under caste of people of color, but it also does the same for all the disenfranchised, White, poor, female, or the children of these. What concerns me about this situation is that people returning home to Muskingum County, after serving sentences, in either the county or state penal institutions, they do not have the resources that they need to restart their lives. In many instances, they come back to the same dysfunctional situation that led them to commit their offenses in the first place. Alexander writes about one young woman's experience after her release:

When I leave here it will be very difficult for me in the sense that I'm a felon. That I will always be a felon ... for me to leave here, it will affect my job, it will affect my education ... custody [of my children], it can affect child support, it can affect everywhere – family, friends, housing.... People that are convicted of drug crimes can't even get housing anymore.... Yes, I did my prison time. How long are you going to punish me as a result of it? And not only on paper, I'm only on paper for ten months when I leave here, that's all the parole I have. But that parole isn't going to be anything. It's the housing, it's the credit reestablishing.... I mean even to go into the school, to work with my child's class—and I'm not a sex offender – but all I need is one parent who says, "Isn't she a felon? I don't want her with my child."¹⁰

⁹ Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (New York, NY: The New Press, 2010), 13, Kindle.

¹⁰ Alexander, *The New Jim Crow*, 157.

It is difficult for returning offenders to pick up where they left off. Many of them would end up back in prison if they did. Many of the inmates know about the hardships that they will face. They try to lessen the chances of failure by asking about transitional housing. These residential facilities provide them with a place to stay and some of the services they will need to get back on their feet. Unfortunately, in many areas of the state these facilities just do not exist. One of my tasks as a Case Manager for the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Corrections is to place returning citizens who will be on state supervision into approved halfway or transitional housing. In Muskingum County and many other Southeastern Ohio counties, there is no transitional housing to place them. For instance, anyone from Muskingum County being released on supervision, must go to one of two transitional housing facilities in adjacent Fairfield or Licking County.¹¹ This creates a hardship on family members trying to maintain contact with their loved one. It also creates a hardship on the restored citizen who would like to live in the town that they grew up in and are familiar with. This difficulty is compounded if the returning citizen is a female. The facility mentioned above is only for male offenders. Female offenders on supervision must be placed even further from their families and support systems. Those who are sentenced to diversion programs instead of prison, both male and female are transported even further away. The nearest facility is in Athens County, which is over an hour south of Zanesville.

All this information suggests that Muskingum County needs adequate resources to effectively aid returning offenders in continuing their rehabilitation in society after they have served their time. The question then becomes how can the church, and especially

¹¹ Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Corrections, "Halfway House Directory," Ohio.gov, https://drc.ohio.gov/Portals/0/CBCF/HWH_Directory.pdf?ver=2016-09-01-153322-220.

Union Baptist Church, be a resource that can help people returning from incarceration make the choices and find the support that they need to become law-abiding citizens?

Zanesville is not completely without resources that are committed to helping ex-offenders. One of the agencies helping is called “Forever Dads.” This organization aims to design and manage programming to encourage, educate, and equip men to develop positive relationships with their children, family, and community.¹² They are also a part of the Restored Citizens Network, a collaboration of various agencies having the common mission of reducing recidivism among those who will return from incarceration to Muskingum and surrounding counties. One of the features of the network is the Citizen’s Circle. This is a group of law enforcement, social service, and business professionals that meet ex-offenders and help them navigate a path toward self-sufficiency and away from criminal activity. The network seeks members of the faith community to become involved in the work of helping restored citizens. It is believed that interaction with church groups and other faith-based organizations will give returning citizens access to positive role-models and another layer of social support that some agencies cannot provide. I believe that developing a partnership with the Citizen’s Circle would be a good way for our small congregation to make a significant impact and help some of the most vulnerable people in our community.

This potential project resonates with me because it reflects one of the aspects of my journey as detailed in my Spiritual Autobiography. I detailed in my life that there were a few times that I had to start over again after some tragedy or poor decision on my part. I have known what it is to struggle through during situations that seemed at the time

¹² Forever Dads, “About Forever Dads,” Forever Dads, <https://foreverdads.com/about>.

to be almost insurmountable. I have also had to deal with the rejection of loved ones, friends, and associates when I may have needed them the most. In those situations, often I had well-meaning people tell me that they would pray for me. I thanked them for the thought, but I needed someone to point me in the right direction and hold me accountable for my good decisions and the bad choices I made. This is the same thing that ex-offenders need.

A few years ago, I was in a meeting with chaplains from various prisons. A question was raised about what churches could do to help the chaplains with the spiritual nurture of their “flocks.” One of the chaplains, who happened to be the president of the state chaplain association said that the last thing they needed was to have more churches coming to the prisons for Bible study or church services. He said what he needed more than anything was to be able to call a church to get a mattress for a young man who had contacted him after his release to ask if he knew where to get one because he and his girlfriend were sleeping on the floor of an empty house. The chaplain said it was easy for a church to come to the prison and preach or sing, but that the real work was on the outside helping newly released men and women put their lives back together. Now we have the need, and people who have been incarcerated are returning to society needing material, social and spiritual guidance to be successful in re-orienting themselves to life on the “outside.”

There are 608 people from Muskingum County who are currently incarcerated in Ohio’s prison system. Out of that number, 541 of them are male and sixty-seven are female; 451 are White and 146 are Black. The remaining eleven are classified as “other”

which includes Hispanic, Asian, and Native American.¹³ As of 2018, there are 186 ex-offenders from Muskingum County that are currently under some kind of state supervision including Parole, Post Release Control, Judicial Release, Transitional Control, or Community Control. Of that number, 116 are residing in Muskingum County.¹⁴ In total, there are almost 800 people who have some kind of involvement with the criminal justice system from Muskingum County. When the total inmates from the county jail and those involved with the juvenile justice system, the numbers rise to over 1000 individuals that are involved in the criminal justice system in Muskingum County. The state of Ohio estimates that 20% of the people involved with the criminal justice system (as of 2010) will reoffend and end up back in prison. That is approximately 200 people who stand a chance this year of having to endure the cycle of arrest, arraignment, court, and conviction again. This not only affects them, but it also affects their loved ones, including their children.

What factors contribute to this revolving door scenario of arrest, incarceration, release, re-arrest, incarceration, and release, called recidivism? Before an answer can be given to that question, a larger question must be asked: What are the socioeconomic factors in Muskingum County that contribute to individuals committing crimes in the first place?

The primary reason for people in Muskingum County to be involved in the criminal justice system is because jobs that hire those who have no high school diploma

¹³ Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Corrections, "Institution Census 2018, Muskingum County," Bureau of Research, <https://drc.ohio.gov/reports/institution-census>.

¹⁴ Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Corrections, "Institution Census 2018," <https://drc.ohio.gov/Portals/0/2018%20APA%20Census.pdf>.

or who have just a high school diploma are not plentiful. Twenty percent of adults over twenty-five-years of age in Zanesville do not have a high school diploma or GED. There are 3% of adults who are over twenty-five years old that have less than a ninth-grade education, and 17.3% of adults who got past the ninth grade but did not matriculate. This is 8.8% higher than the state average.¹⁵ The jobs that will hire those who have no diploma, or its equivalent do not pay a living wage enabling a wage-earner to raise a family, obtain decent housing, or advance their education. The alternative to this situation is participation in the informal black market. This involves things like working “under the table” earning money for odd jobs that pay in cash, trafficking in stolen goods, drugs, or weapons, or being involved in the sex trade. Zanesville, Ohio has the highest incidences of thefts and burglaries of the cities surrounding it.¹⁶ Drug crimes have increased also. In 2017, law enforcement officers seized 5,821.31 grams of meth, 22,818 grams of marijuana, and 40,660 pills compared to 2015 when officers confiscated 2,251.95 grams of meth, 249.2 grams of marijuana and 454 pills.¹⁷ Drug Treatment Center Director, Steven Carrell, states that the opioid addiction problem is growing worse in the area.¹⁸ His organization, Muskingum Behavioral Health, has seen a significant increase in clients seeking help with their substance addiction. He also states that this problem is not

¹⁵ City Data, “Zanesville Census Data,” City Data, <http://www.city-data.com/city/Zanesville-Ohio.html#b>.

¹⁶ City Data, “Crime Rate in Zanesville, Ohio,” City Data, <http://www.city-data.com/crime/crime-Zanesville-Ohio.html>.

¹⁷ Kate Snyder, “Stats Show Drug Crimes, Overdoses Skyrocketing,” Zanesville Times Recorder, <https://www.zanesvilletimesrecorder.com/story/news/local/2018/02/03/stats-show-drug-crimes-overdoses-skyrocketing/1085943001/>.

¹⁸ Nathan Harris, “Muskingum Behavioral Health Expands to Combat Opioid Crisis,” Zanesville Times Recorder, <https://www.zanesvilletimesrecorder.com/story/news/2018/08/30/muskingum-behavioral-health-expands-combat-opioid-crisis/1137599002/>.

isolated among the poor. Many people from every socioeconomic stratum have become addicted to opioids. Many started after being prescribed legal pain medication. The difference is that those in higher income brackets have better access to treatment. The poor have fewer resources to combat this epidemic. If they are not eligible for Medicaid, or coverage from the health insurance exchange, they would be charged full price for treatment, which many simply cannot afford.

I have identified the issue of men and women who have been incarcerated, returning home to Muskingum County having difficulties in readjusting to life on the outside. Many have issues that contribute to this difficulty, such as no high school diploma or GED, convictions for thefts and assaults, convictions for drug abuse and or the inability to successfully pass a drug screen, homelessness, few resources in the community that can give them the help that they need, and not knowing about the resources that do exist and availing themselves to them. Often, they return home with some resolve to stay clean and pick up the pieces of their lives, but difficulties begin to arise, such as finding adequate housing, getting a job, reconnecting with family, and developing a new network of friends and associates that are not involved in criminal activity. Often, they return to the same area of town where they were involved in criminal activity. They see many of the people that either participated in crimes with them or kept silent about them.

In one sensational case in Muskingum County a man, who killed a woman and tried to cover up the crime enlisted the aid of over forty other people throughout the area to help him. Many others had knowledge of the crime but kept silent about it. Those who have been incarcerated for the smallest involvement on this incident will return to the

same area, around the same people. Without some sort of positive intervention, they will fall into the same habits and associations that led to their previous offense and will contribute to their committing other crimes. Many correctional experts agree that the first three years after release are critical in the life of an ex-offender. The data shows the highest number of rearrests and reconvictions, as well as returns to prison, happened in the third year of release.¹⁹ I believe that this is an area that the faith community can be a valuable asset to the re-entry community. Many experts agree that increased programming within the prison and stronger community groups outside the prison are contributing to reduced recidivism in Ohio.²⁰ What is often overlooked is the role of the faith community's involvement in the rehabilitation of former offenders. According to a report by the Ohio Correctional Faith-Based Initiatives Task Force, involvement of the faith community in the reintegration process of ex-offenders reduces recidivism.²¹

When considering what to do to help returning citizens, it is important to note that there are four areas that continue to be mentioned by corrections professionals and community advocates that ex-offender have expressed as necessary for success on the outside: employment, housing, substance abuse, mental health treatment, and support and or mentoring. Other needs include re-unification of families (where possible, but in some cases the victims of their offenses have been family members), positive peer relationships

¹⁹ Paige Paulson, "The Role of Community Based Programs in Reducing Recidivism in Ex-Offenders," St. Catherine University, https://sophia.stkate.edu/msw_papers/247.

²⁰ John Caniglia, "Recidivism Rate in Ohio Prison System Continues to Drop: State Report," *The Cleveland Plain Dealer*, March 2014, https://www.cleveland.com/metro/index.ssf/2014/03/state_report_recidivism_rate_i.html.

²¹ Ohio Department of Public Safety, "Report to the Ohio General Assembly from the Correctional Faith-Based Initiatives Task Force," Ohio.gov, https://www.publicsafety.ohio.gov/links/ocjs_FB_GOODFinal.pdf.

and positive recreational and social outlets. Many returning offenders feel isolated and ostracized by society, and many have had family and friends reject them because of their incarceration. Lack of employment opportunities, difficulty obtaining decent housing, and difficulty navigating the social services system. This has led some to return to the people, places and things that they were involved in that got them in trouble in the first place.

The faith-based community is in a unique position to disrupt that cycle and provide hope and help. One of the other things that ex-offenders need has not been mentioned, forgiveness. Although this did not show up in the identified needs in the various reports, I have included it because my experience with ex-offenders has shown that many of them carry a weight of guilt and shame over their incarceration. They feel that they have cut themselves off from the law-abiding segment of society. Therefore, they struggle with not being accepted by society. Some feel that they have committed the unpardonable sin of going to prison. While there are programs within the prison system that help inmates deal with the damage they have caused their victims, family, and society and how they can seek forgiveness and make amends, very little time is spent on self-healing and forgiveness. Faith-based organizations, especially the church, can help them understand and experience grace and mercy.

Union Baptist has partnered with Prison Fellowship, the prison ministry organization founded by former Nixon advisor and ex-felon the late Chuck Colson, in providing Christmas gifts and food to families of incarcerated individuals in the Zanesville area. This organization, and many like it, have resources that can help churches get involved in the reintegration process. They have materials and programs that

are designed to meet the needs of inmate families throughout their incarceration and help the ex-offender upon release. Another organization that is impacting youth offenders is UTEC, which stands for “United Teen Equality Center.” Their mission includes job training and employment in their recycling facility, high school/GED instruction, gang violence prevention, daycare for young adult parents, and substance abuse counseling. They have a wide variety of programs and events that engage at-risk youth and young adults in social services, relationship building, and leadership training. These are areas that I would like to see in Zanesville offered to young and old alike. Having said this, I believe that the doctoral project that I would like to work on is a collaboration between Union Baptist Church and community partners to bring wrap-around services to returning ex-offenders to the Zanesville, Muskingum County area.

The reason for the collaboration is simple. Although our church is beginning to position itself to be able to offer services on a stand-alone basis, we currently do not have the resources to do so. The solution to this is to partner with organizations like Forever Dads and the Restored Citizen’s Network of Muskingum County, which is involved in the re-entry field and serve in an area that is needed. I believe that the most needed component of the re-entry process is mentoring. Many of the people that return from prison have no one to hold them accountable to continue with the recovery or rehabilitation that they started while incarcerated. Without some level of accountability, many people fall back into old associations and habits that caused problems for them. To be fair, Muskingum County has a Citizen’s Circle network that is designed to bring accountability to returning ex-offenders. However, in looking at the makeup of the Citizen’s Circle, it does not seem equipped to meet some of the immediate basic needs of

returning offenders such as food, clothing, hygiene items, healthcare, substance abuse, and mental health counseling. Most importantly, is the need for positive associations with people that believe in their success, and act as accountability partners in their recovery and re-integration. I believe that the church can meet this need if the faith community is willing to purposefully engage our community.

Paulson writes, “Community connections are about real people having positive relationships that are built upon trust and care for another human being.”²² The Citizen’s Circles can do only so much when it comes to engaging with ex-offenders. The church can accomplish this kind of close, interpersonal relationship building not only with the returning citizen, but also with whatever social network he or she may have in the community. Engaging with the family of the returning person gives everyone involved a resource that can provide needed material and emotional support. It is only becoming more accepted today that the families and neighborhoods of the offenders have also been victimized by their actions. Bringing the church, the ex-offender, the family, and the community together to heal and move forward, to hold the offender accountable, and to advocate for adequate resources that promote permanent change is part of what the Apostle Paul called the ministry of reconciliation.

²² Paulson, “The Role of Community Based Programs in Reducing Recidivism in Ex-Offenders,” https://sophia.stkate.edu/msw_papers/247.

CHAPTER TWO

BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS

The scriptural basis for this biblical foundation is Matthew 25:31-40:

When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left. Then the king will say to those at his right hand, ‘Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.’ Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?’ And the king will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me’ (Mt. 25:31-40).

There is little internal evidence that Matthew is the actual author of the book. More likely, an unknown author within the Syrian Jewish Christian community wrote this gospel and signed it with Matthew’s name. This was a common practice, done to either pay homage to the attributed author or to ensure that the work would receive wider circulation and validation as authentic. Whatever the reason for signing this work with Matthew’s name, interestingly those from the community of the gospel’s origin did not consider themselves as radically departing from the faith of their forefathers or of the larger Jewish community. Their understanding was that their faith in Jesus as the Messiah was the fulfillment of the Old Testament scriptures. They considered themselves and the

Christian community of which they were a part as the embodiments of Jesus' words, "Don't assume that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill" (Mt. 5:17). They understood that being a part of the Jesus movement was the culmination of their spiritual evolution.

The author of this gospel used material from the Gospel of Mark to complete his work. Both Mathew and Luke used Mark as a primary reference in writing their respective gospels. Both used another, hypothetical source that scholars have designated "Q" from the German word "Quelle" meaning "source." The Book of Matthew was written within the last twenty-five years of the first century CE by a Greek-speaking Jewish Christian author.¹ This gospel bears the name of one of the original disciples of Christ. Senior writes, "While it may be unlikely that the tax collector Matthew is the direct author of the Gospel, this does not rule out the possibility that this apostle had some traditional connection with the community from which the Gospel eventually emerged" (Mt. 9:9). The narrative calls Matthew a publican or tax collector when Jesus called him.

The author of this source and many manuscripts have been lost to history, but the author intersperses evidence throughout the gospel that he used this source. The Q material, most or all of which belonged to a single written source, consists of about 235 verses or 4500 words of text. This material consists mainly of sayings of John the Baptist and Jesus, two miracle stories (the healing of the centurion's serving boy and an

¹ Donald Senior, *Matthew, Abingdon Bible Commentaries* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1998), 21, Kindle.

exorcism) and the Temptation story.² The significance of Q lies in its focus on Jesus' sayings. Also significant is what Q lacks, and what it emphasizes. Q lacks a continuous narrative but is organized topically. Q lacks a Passion-resurrection narrative and birth stories, it has only two miracle stories, and is primarily interested in the sayings or controversies that these miracles occasion. Also, while Q uses such titles as "Son of Man," "Son of God" and "the Coming One," it does not use the term "Messiah." Q is less concerned with defending a certain Christology and more interested in characterizing the "kingdom of God" and the behavior and attitude consistent with the kingdom.³

At the time of this gospel's composition, over 600 years passed since Israel existed as an independent state. Starting with the fall of Jerusalem by Babylon, the Jewish people endured being under Persian, Greek, and finally Roman rule.⁴ They longed for a king who would rescue them from foreign domination. During Roman occupation, starting around 63 BCE and continuing through the time of Jesus, Israel enjoyed certain privileges as rewards for siding with Roman authorities during the early days of the republic and then the empire. This included exemption from military service, from certain tributes (taxes), from having to appear before magistrates on the Sabbath or holy day, and as long as a sacrifice was offered in the Temple "for Caesar and the Roman Nation," Rome required no other test of loyalty.⁵ Even with all the "perks" that Rome gave to the

² John S. Kloppenborg, "Q – Biblical Studies," Oxford Bibliographies, last modified September 3, 2010, <http://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780195393361/obo-9780195393361-0101.xml>.

³ Kloppenborg, "Q – Biblical Studies," <http://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780195393361/obo-9780195393361-0101.xml>.

⁴ Everett Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2003), 399-426.

⁵ Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity*, 429.

Jews, they were still a people not free to determine their own destiny. For example, at the time of Jesus' birth, Herod the Great was king although God or the prophets did not choose him, and although the right to succession through the lineage of David did not belong to him. the Roman Senate appointed him. This is the same Herod that, while he sought to destroy the promised Messiah by killing an entire village's male infants, also rebuilt the Jewish Temple that was in use during the time of Jesus' ministry.

The major radical political groups in Palestine at the time of Jesus' ministry were the Zealots, the Pharisees, the Sadducees, the Herodians, Samaritans and communities like the Essenes and the Therapeutae.⁶ The Zealots sought to incite the people of Judea Province to rebel against the Roman empire and expel it from the Holy Land by force. Membership in this group cut across many party lines and included priests, Pharisees, and common folk. Some believe that the two "thieves" that the Romans crucified alongside Jesus and Barabbas, the man that was freed by Pilate instead of Jesus, were all part of this group. The Sadducees, whose name seems to be derived from the High Priest Zadok of Solomon's time, was a group largely composed of priests of the Zadokite line. They are first mentioned in connection with John Hyrcanus I (134-104 BCE).

The Temple destruction (70 CE) led to the disappearance of the priestly groups and their literatures. Knowledge of the Sadducees comes through secondary references to them in ancient Jewish and Christian writings. From all indications, the Sadducees were members of influential Jerusalem families, and therefore of the "upper classes." Historically, they came into conflict with the Pharisees and thus opposed them for political and religious reasons. As priests, they sacrificed at the Jerusalem Temple,

⁶ Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity*, 514-538.

dominated the Sanhedrin and, as political leaders, attempted to maintain cordial relations with their Roman overlords. This conservative political stance ran parallel to their conservatism in religion. They held to a more literal reading of the Torah, which for them was the Pentateuch, and did not accept the oral tradition, which was the special prerogative of the Pharisees. They also rejected the existence of angels, demons, and the resurrection of the dead (Acts 23:8; Mk. 12:18-27). They were strict in matters they believed were based in the Torah such as the Sabbath laws. When the war with Rome became imminent, they attempted to mediate, but to no avail.⁷

The name Pharisee is probably derived from the Hebrew “perushim,” or the Aramaic “perishaya,” which means “the separated (ones).” Like the Sadducees, they first appeared in the late second century BCE under the Maccabees, but later separated from them after John Hyrcanus exacted revenge on them for a Pharisee’s criticism of his mother. They returned to prominence under Queen Alexandra (76-69 BCE) and gradually increased in stature.⁸ Unlike the Sadducees, most Pharisees were not priests, but lay scholars whose main influence was in their development and preservation of the oral legal tradition. Thus, they were rooted in the synagogue and known for pious living (alms, tithing, prayer, and fasting) and interpretation of the Torah, especially in areas such as food purity, crops, Sabbaths, festivals, and family affairs. In contrast to the Sadducees, they accepted the larger view of Scripture, as well as newer views such as angels, demons, and the resurrection of the dead.

⁷ James Tabor, “The Jewish World of Jesus: An Overview,” The Jewish Roman World of Jesus, UNC Charlotte, <https://pages.uncc.edu/james-tabor/the-jewish-world-of-jesus-an-overview/>.

⁸ Tabor, “The Jewish World of Jesus,” <https://pages.uncc.edu/james-tabor/the-jewish-world-of-jesus-an-overview/>.

The New Testament pictures Jesus as frequently in debate with the “Scribes and the Pharisees,” with the former having perhaps formed still another, separate group. The Pharisees were divided into various “schools,” the best known being those of Hillel and Shammai in the first century. Unlike the Sadducees, the rabbinic literature preserved many of the Pharisaic traditions, because the Pharisees survived the war with Rome at the end of the first century and reorganized Judaism along Pharisaic lines. The Pharisees decided the canon of the Jewish scriptures, added the oral traditions, and included the prayer against the Christians and Heretics that was added to the important set of Jewish prayers – the Eighteen Benedictions. From that point on, the heart of Judaism was the Torah, the synagogue, and the interpretation of Torah by the rabbis.⁹

The Herodians were a political party that supported King Herod Antipas, the Roman Empire’s ruler over much of the land of the Jews from 4 BCE to 39 CE. The Herodians favored submitting to the Herods, and, therefore, to Rome for political expediency. This support of Herod compromised Jewish independence in the minds of the Pharisees, making it difficult for the Herodians and Pharisees to unite and agree on anything. Like the Pharisees, the Herodians wanted political independence for the Jewish people. Unlike the Pharisees who sought to restore the kingdom of David, the Herodians wished to restore a member of the Herodian dynasty to the throne in Judea. The New Testament books of Matthew and Mark mention the Herodians along with the Pharisees when it came to opposition to Jesus’ teachings and ministry.¹⁰

⁹ Tabor, “The Jewish World of Jesus,” <https://pages.uncc.edu/james-tabor/the-jewish-world-of-jesus-an-overview/>.

¹⁰ Bible Study Tools, “Samaritans Definition and Meaning,” Bible Dictionary, <https://www.biblestudytools.com/dictionary/samaritans/>.

Samaritans was the name given to the new and mixed inhabitants that the king of Assyria, Esarhaddon, brought from Babylon and other places, and settled in the cities of Samaria in place of the original inhabitants whom his predecessor, Sargon II, removed into captivity. These non-Jewish peoples merged with the Jews remaining in the land, and gradually abandoned their old idolatry and partly adopted the Jewish religion.¹¹ After the return from captivity, the Jews in Jerusalem refused to allow them to take part with them in rebuilding the temple – beginning a rivalry and division that presently endures. They erected a rival temple on Mount Gerizim, which was destroyed by a Jewish king around 130 BCE. They then built another at Shechem. The bitter enmity between the Jews and Samaritans continued in the time of Jesus. One passage of scripture clearly points out that the Jews had “no dealings with the Samaritans” (Jn. 4:9).

In Judea, the legal system had three levels. The highest court was the Great Sanhedrin, which had seventy-one judges. Lesser courts with twenty-three judges dealt with death penalty cases. Lower courts with three judges handled most civil and criminal matters. Most of these courts stopped functioning after the Romans destroyed the temple in Jerusalem. In countries that permitted them to operate, however, three-judge courts continued to hand out justice in Jewish communities.

Many parts of the Torah, Talmud, and the codes of law that were written later described due process procedures to ensure fair trials. Anyone accused of a crime had the right of bail except in death-penalty cases. Traditional Jewish courts had no trained lawyers arguing cases. The prosecutor was either the victim or, if killed, a relative or someone appointed by the court. The accused could self-defend or ask another to plead

¹¹ Bible Study Tools, “Samaritans Definition and Meaning,”
<https://www.biblestudytools.com/dictionary/samaritans/>.

the accused's case. Evidence included documents and the testimony of witnesses. The consistent testimony of two male witnesses to the crime was necessary to convict the accused. The judges closely cross-examined witnesses in the presence of the accused. Circumstantial evidence alone was never enough to find someone guilty. Witnesses who broke the commandment "Thou shalt not bear false witness" (Ex. 20:16 KJV) faced the same penalty that the accused would have suffered. The accused had an absolute right against self-incrimination and was not permitted to make statements that were harmful to the accused. Likewise, confessions were not admissible evidence in court. There was no jury. The judges deliberated as the accused watched. The youngest judge spoke his opinion first to avoid being influenced by the senior judges. The judges then decided the verdict by majority vote.¹²

This foundation now examines the biblical and historical material for insight into how prisons operated in the time of Jesus. Imprisonment served a different function in biblical times than it does in modern time. Society at that time was also vastly different, with stronger communal bonds and a different range of punitive options available to those in authority. In the ancient world, prisons were usually underground dungeons, empty cisterns or wells, or pits in ground. They were dark and miserable places.¹³ Jeremiah was put in "a cistern house" for many days. When he was released for

¹² Constitutional Rights Foundation, "The Hebrews and Foundations of Western Law," *Bill of Right in Action* 16, no. 4 (Fall 2000), <http://www.crf-usa.org/bill-of-rights-in-action/bria-16-4-a-the-hebrews-and-the-foundation-of-western-law>.

¹³ Christopher D. Marshall, "Prison, Prisoners and the Bible" (paper presented at the "Breaking Down the Walls Conference," Matamata, NZ, June 14-16, 2002), Restorative Justice, <http://restorativejustice.org/10fulltext/marshall-christopher.-prison-prisoners-and-the-bible.pdf>.

interrogation, he begged not to be returned to his cell fearing he would die there.¹⁴

Micaiah was put in prison on starvation rations of bread and water.¹⁵ Things were no better in New Testament times. With few exceptions, prisons in the Roman period were dark, disease-ridden, and overcrowded places. Prisoners commonly died in custody from disease, starvation, extreme torture, execution, or suicide. Ancient authors commonly described imprisonment as a fate worse than death.

While prolonged imprisonment was not used in biblical times as a form of criminal punishment, it was still used for political and military ends. Imprisonment was a way of silencing prophets who voiced criticism of the reigning king or gave him unwelcome advice. It kept defeated enemies under control, or detained people accused of disloyalty. Persons also used imprisonment as a way of holding individuals before selling them into slavery or putting prisoners of war into servitude. Persons could use imprisonment to prevent debtors from absconding, with the torments inflicted upon them in custody being an added incentive for their families to ransom them from bondage. In the New Testament, prison often served as an instrument of religious persecution. The Bible always depicted prisoners as the victims of injustice, and stories about prisoners are invariably told from the point of view of the prisoner as opposed to the perspective of those who did the imprisoning.

Movies and dramas today influence many to think prisoners were either regularly fed to the lions in the arenas or forced to perform dangerous, menial tasks for the rest of

¹⁴ Marshall, "Prison, Prisoners and the Bible," <http://restorativejustice.org/10fulltext/marshall-christopher.-prison-prisoners-and-the-bible.pdf>.

¹⁵ Marshall, "Prison, Prisoners and the Bible," <http://restorativejustice.org/10fulltext/marshall-christopher.-prison-prisoners-and-the-bible.pdf>.

their lives. The idea exists that condemned prisoners ended up on Roman battle ships as rowers. However, no historical evidence exists that proves that the Roman navies extensively used condemned prisoners to power their vessels during naval battles. The image of the condemned prisoner being shackled to his rowing station and going down with the sinking ship (as depicted in the movies like Ben Hur) is inaccurate. The truth is, convicted criminals were generally not used to row ships in ancient times because they could not be trusted to perform adequately in an emergency. Slaves were better suited in an emergency because they were promised and often granted freedom for their service. Most of the rowers serving on ships during the Roman period were free men and mercenaries from foreign countries. The prisoner-rower did not emerge until the Middle Ages.

Many families would put their reputations and even their lives in jeopardy whenever they would visit their loved ones who were locked up. In some cases, public officials and the jailers would extort family member in exchange for lenient treatment or early release. In many cases innocent family members ran the risk of being imprisoned just for associating with the accused and convicted. Prisons served no food; therefore, inmates would have to buy or steal whatever they could to survive. Families would often bear the cost and the reproach for taking care of a loved one behind bars.

Having dealt with some of the historical and cultural aspects of the era in which the Gospel of Matthew emerged and having examined how the prison system functioned in the time of Jesus, this foundation now focuses on the passage in Matthew chapter twenty-five. The last of the five discourses that appear in the gospel includes this passage. These discourses include the Sermon on the Mount (Mt.4:17-7:29), the Mission

Discourse (Mt. 9:36-11:1), the Parable Discourse (Mt. 13:1-53), the Discourse on Community (Mt. 18:1-35), and the Discourse on the Final Age and Judgement (24:1-25:26).

Here, Jesus makes his entrance into Jerusalem being hailed as the “Son of David” – an obvious reference that, at least to his disciples, Jesus is the promised Messiah and true king of Israel. Jesus’ choice to enter the city with an outward show of humility speaks volumes because he does so amid an adoring crowd – a crowd that is hopeful that this is the beginning of Israel’s resurrection to power and prominence. He comes riding on a donkey’s colt. Senior writes, “Jesus’ royal authority is in full view as this triumphant procession enters David’s city and its temple. But this is a King like no other, one who is “humble” and mounted on common beasts of burden.”¹⁶ This contrast between what the people expect and what Jesus displays underscores Matthew’s understanding that the kingdom of God, as embodied in the person of Christ, is a “now” kingdom but Jesus’ arrival as a humble servant indicates the “not yet” idea of the kingdom’s eventual culmination. The inclusion of this “triumphal entry” in Matthew’s gospel also emphasizes again the reality that the Jews during this time were in a submissive relationship with Rome. This episode is a form of resistance to imperialization as the community “writes back to challenge Roman power.”¹⁷ After entering the city, Jesus goes to the Temple and throws out the money changers. He declares that their actions and the insinuated

¹⁶ Senior, *Matthew*, 230.

¹⁷ Fernando F. Segovia and R. S. Sugirtharajah, eds., *A Postcolonial Commentary on the New Testament Writings* (London, UK: T and T Clark, 2007), location 518, Kindle.

collusion of the religious leaders in the extortion and exploitation of the vulnerable made the place of worship into a den of thieves.¹⁸

After this episode, the religious leaders challenged Jesus' authority. He answers their challenges by relating to them two parables. The first parable is about a father who asks his two sons to work in the vineyard. One agrees to work but does not go. The other refuses to obey at first, then goes on to do what his father asked. In the other parable, the disobedient ones are tenants who are contracted to farm the owners' land. The son comes to represent the father to the tenants. They kill him in hopes of stealing the land. Jesus points out in both these stories that those who refuse to do the master's will are left out of the promise of the coming kingdom. At the conclusion of the parable of the two sons, Jesus declares that the undesirables – the dregs of society – will come into the kingdom of God before the religious leaders. Jesus criticizes them for their hypocrisy and their rejection of him.

In chapter twenty-two, Jesus confronts them with another parable. This time he tells the story of a king who prepares a great feast, but the ones who he invited refuse to come, so the king opens his doors to the "scum" of society. He allows the poor, crippled, the blind and the lame, the forgotten, and forsaken to enter before the invited. The rest of the chapter involves Jesus answering challenges thrown at him by the religious leaders. They ask him about the responsibility of paying the tribute (taxes). They question his theological understanding on the issue of resurrection, and on the duty of humans to love God and care for each other. Jesus questions them regarding their understanding of who the Messiah is and the basis of his claim to be the Son of David.

¹⁸ Michael Joseph Brown, "Matthew," *True to Our Native Land: An African American New Testament Commentary*, ed. Brian K. Blount (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2007), 112-113.

Chapters twenty-three contains the most pointed criticism of the religious leaders in the gospel. Senior writes:

The contents of the speech suggest a three-part division: (1) 23: 1-12, an introductory section condemning the scribes and Pharisees for their hypocrisy and status seeking, coupled with an exhortation to the disciples; (2) 23: 13-36, seven prophetic woes; (3) 23: 37-39, a prophetic lament over the fate of Jerusalem.¹⁹

Through this diatribe, Jesus outlines those values that are important to him, and by extension, to the kingdom of God. He declares that the religious leaders ought to practice what they preach, that they ought to show compassion instead of burdening people down with guilt and rule on top of rule, and that they ought not use religion as a way to boost their egos. Jesus also declares that the religious leaders should show respect to all members of the community, and that mercy and justice should guide them in their interpretation of the law.

In chapters twenty-four and twenty-five, Jesus turns from criticism of the religious leaders to an eschatological overview of the future, as it relates to the actions and behaviors of the true disciples and the rule of the Son of God in the great kingdom that will be established on earth. Chapter twenty-four begins with Jesus' prediction of the destruction of the Jewish Temple that occurred in 70 CE at the hands of the Roman General Titus. History records:

Titus had to the last been most desirous to spare at least the temple, but a torch thrown into it by a soldier quickly enveloped it in flames, which could not be suppressed. Thus, perished the proud and beautiful city, which 'would not have this man reign over it.' With it perished the last remainder of the typical dispensation, and of the Jewish state.²⁰

¹⁹ Senior, *Matthew*, 257.

²⁰ Alfred Edersheim, *A History of the Jewish Nation After the Destruction of Jerusalem Under Titus* (Edinburgh, UK: WordSearch Corp., 2005), 38.

The apocalyptic discourse begins with the disciples asking Jesus about the end of the age and the coming messianic kingdom. Jesus starts with a warning to guard against being led astray (Mt. 24:4-5). Jesus gives them a “heads up” as to social, political, and even environmental upheavals that will take place. Through all this turmoil, the disciples are to remain faithful to Christ and to the work of the kingdom. To illustrate this point, Jesus relates three parables that deal in contrasts. He contrasts a vigilant homeowner with the thief, a faithful servant with a lazy and wicked servant, and contrasts wise and foolish virgins (Mt. 24:43-25:31). He then relates the parable of the talents where a master gives three servants funds or resources matching their abilities. The first two servants deal responsibly with the master’s resources and the master rewards them. The master strips the other servant of the resources that the master entrusted with this servant and this servant is cast out of the community. The lesson is clear in that amid an increasingly hostile society, the disciple of Christ is to continue to work at doing good for the kingdom’s sake. Senior writes, “this also means living in an active and responsible manner while awaiting the end time, doing good and using the gifts and opportunities God gives.”²¹ Verses thirty-one through forty-six illustrates this idea of doing good and living responsibly.

In this passage the Son of Man is now the king, and he separated people into what Matthew illustrates as sheep and goats. As in the other parables there is the contrast between those who are blessed or worthy and those who are not. In the gospel writer’s time, the sheep and goats may have been symbolic of those who were members of the Christian community contrasted with those who were not. Most scholars agree that this

²¹ Senior, *Matthew*, 279.

passage was not trying to create a rift between Jewish and non-Jewish believers. When this separation occurs, the king addresses those on his right hand saying that they have been faithful in feeding the hungry, giving water to the thirsty, and showing kindness toward the stranger, the naked, the sick and those in prison saying that in showing compassionate concern for them, they ministered to Christ. The fact that the righteous had to ask when they did these things to Jesus indicates that true concern for the downtrodden and not in anticipation for any reward motivated their actions. Jesus states, “I was in prison and you visited me” (Mt. 25:36). This phrase provides a foundation for a case for Christians and local re-entry organizations to partner together and get involved in the re-entry of ex-offenders. As in ancient days, where the day-to-day survival of those who were incarcerated often depended upon the kindness of family and friends, so now this same concerned care for and guidance of those who are being released from prison is needed today.

Senior writes that the ones in prison are the Christian missionaries that spread the message of the gospel to “all the nations,” and that those who ministered to them – and by default to the Christ – are unbelieving Gentiles that show love and concern without having encountered Jesus.²² Bloomberg disagrees with this interpretation writing that, “the text never says they were surprised to be saved, merely that they did not understand how they had ministered so directly to Jesus.”²³ Augsburg states that the preaching of the gospel should go hand in hand with deeds that have a social implication. Deed and

²² Senior, *Matthew*, 285.

²³ Craig L. Bloomberg, *Matthew: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture, The New American Commentary*, vol. 22 (Nashville, TN: B and H Publishing Group, 1992), 377, Kindle.

word go hand in hand.²⁴ When the righteous address the king, they call him “Lord” (*Kyrios*). This title could also be translated “master,” in keeping with the previous parable of the master giving his servants talents. Each of them calls him master. This shows evidence of relationship. Even the wicked servant drew upon his relationship with the master to justify his inaction. The righteous know the king and are known by the king.

While most scholars agree the ones to whom the disciples ministered were those who spread the gospel message, there is still room in the interpretation to include all those who are sick and in need, and especially those who are in prison. The bottom line is that those in the Christian community, in light of the coming of the Son of Man to assume his throne as king, must actively engage in doing as much good for as many people as possible, for as long as they can. In the light of this interpretation, Todd and Jennifer Pick describe a concept borrowed from Jewish tradition that illustrates this idea of the faithful doing good:

There is a particular concept that our Jewish brothers and sisters use to describe how they are called to respond to a world that feels like it’s coming apart at the seams. It is a process that calls all humanity into action. *Tikkun Olam*, in the simplest of terms, means “to repair the world.” When the fabric of society is torn, *Tikkun Olam* not only calls each of us to participate in mending what is broken, but to make it better than it was before it was damaged. And when it comes to the art of repairing the world, there are no shortcuts, no easy answers. It is the difficult and time-consuming work of repairing by way of reconciliation and restoration. To repair systems and structures, we usually need to break them down to basic levels, see where the problem is, address the root causes of failure, and then begin rebuilding. It is not hard to look around this world, our own communities, perhaps even our own families, and see a thousand different fissures – cracks where God’s harmonious creation has somehow gone awry. *Tikkun Olam* is not about grand gestures, but rather small acts of kindness, small steps made in faith, small displays of love and solidarity. Each daily action that embodies lovingkindness does not necessarily make an immediate, large impact. But as we keep loving and walking in grace, our collective actions, all together,

²⁴ Myron S. Augsburger, *The Communicator’s Commentary: Matthew* (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1982), 283-284.

can add up. They can begin to make a new world—a whole new creation! —if we only have eyes to see it.²⁵

Joseph Grassi put it this way:

To serve the hungry, thirsty, poor, sick etc., are much more than specific acts of kindness that are a response to the gospel. They are in themselves a very direct service of Jesus himself, and likewise of God that prove that the Christian is an obedient Son of God, just as Jesus was. They are obedience and hearing in the deepest sense of opening up one's being to who God is in his great unconditional love for all and making this an intimate part of one's life by a lifestyle that duplicates that of Jesus.²⁶

These statements indicate that the righteous sheep in the parable are motivated by a desire to identify with the humble and helpful Jesus who went about doing good. Many of the commentaries used in this study had very little to say concerning the part of the chosen pericope that deals with the treatment of the prisoner, other than the fact that the righteous visited them. Looking at the Greek word for visit, the Holman Christian Standard Bible uses the word “*erchomai*,” which has the idea of coming to or accompanying.²⁷ The King James Version translates the word as “*episkeptomai*,” which carries the idea of coming to see about someone to relieve them.²⁸ The idea is that to visit a prisoner is to come and relieve the prisoner's suffering. As previously mentioned, those who were in prison in those days were already condemned and were awaiting punishment. Or the imprisoned were in debt and were being held until family, friends or

²⁵ Todd Pick and Jennifer Pick, “With All Your Heart Worship Series: Coming Together,” Discipleship Ministries, The United Methodist Church, <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/worship/lent-2019-worship-planning-series/march-31-fourth-sunday-in-lent-year-c/fourth-sunday-in-lent-2019-year-c-preaching-notes>.

²⁶ Joseph A. Grassi, “I Was Hungry and You Gave Me to Eat. (Matt. 25:35 Ff.): The Divine Identification Ethic in Matthew,” *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 11, no. 3 (August 1, 1981): 81-84.

²⁷ James Strong, *Strong's Talking Greek and Hebrew Dictionary*, s.v. “*erchomai*,” Kindle.

²⁸ Strong, *Strong's Talking Greek and Hebrew Dictionary*, s.v. “*episkeptomai*.”

any other concerned party could pay their debt, along with a bribe to the jailer in many cases and be released. Until that money could be raised, the visitor would often bring food and warm clothing to the prisoner, because there was no provision in the law to treat prisoners humanely or to meet the prisoner's basic needs. Visiting prisoners then reminded them that they still mattered and reminded them that God is still present even in the darkness.²⁹

Statistically, most people who are now incarcerated will be released. The Bureau of Justice Statistics states that 95% of people now in prison will be freed at some time in the future.³⁰ In Ohio, that means that nearly 50,000 people will go back to the communities that sent them to prison. Although this will not happen all at once, it will happen. In Ohio, over 22,000 people returned home in 2016.³¹ That is nearly half of the current prison population. If nearly 50% of incarcerated Ohioans will return to their communities, what is being done to ensure that they stay out of prisons? Many counties in Ohio offer services to ex-offenders (also called returning citizens), that these counties gear toward helping them to navigate the sometimes-confusing terrain of reintegration. Each of the programs focus on issues like housing, employment, substance abuse, mental health counseling, food assistance, and family reunification if possible. As necessary as these things are, these things are only part of the solution.

One of the real problems for returning citizens is the feeling of disconnect that they feel once they are home. Even those who have been incarcerated for a year or less

²⁹ Marshall, "Prison, Prisoners and the Bible," 13.

³⁰ Timothy Hughes and Doris James Wilson, "Reentry Trends in the U.S.," Bureau of Justice Statistics, last modified June 5, 2020, <https://www.bjs.gov/content/reentry/reentry.cfm>.

³¹ E. Ann Carson, "Prisoners in 2016," Bureau of Justice Statistics, <https://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/p16.pdf>.

find that they have missed important events in their families' lives, or because of their absence, those upon whom they depended for emotional support moved on or found themselves in trouble. Family dynamics may have changed to the point that they may not be welcome in places where they used to be comfortable. Many still, with good intentions to stay away from the negative elements that influenced them to commit crimes, return to the same conditions. At this point the church can visit ("episkeptomai") and become a partner in the restoration of their lives and give them a steady foundation upon which to stand. To accomplish this, churches can employ three elements discussed by Marshall: Care, Critique and Community.³²

Caring could begin even before the offender's release. Every year at Christmas time the church of interest participates in a nation-wide program to distribute gifts to children of incarcerated parents. The church does this to help them stay connected to their families and to show love for their children. Visiting and writing letters are other ways to show that the church cares. Critique is where the church can engage the system. Dialog is needed between the church and the prison system for the culture of "lock-them-up-and-throw-away-the-key" to be eradicated. Not only that, but dialogue is needed between the church and the community to help soften the stigma that all ex-offenders are dangerous, and that good citizens should remain wary of them, to the point of ostracizing and isolating them. While it is true that some ex-offenders need to be closely monitored and kept away from certain members of the community, even they need compassionate care even as they are held accountable for their deeds. Critique could also be used to help

³² Marshall, "Prison, Prisoners and the Bible," 12-15.

returning citizens sort through the negative thoughts that might lead them back to prison.

Marshall writes about community:

The third element of a Christian position on prisons must be a commitment to the reintegration of released prisoners into “communities of care”. Concern for those behind bars must be accompanied by generous hospitality towards them when they have finished their sentences and face the struggle of re-entering an often suspicious and hostile community.³³

The idea of communities of care means that the Christian community walks with the returning citizens to help them navigate the many aspects of their releases. More importantly would be the commitment to be friends in their lives.

Once more, Marshall puts it more eloquently:

What former prisoners need most is a community of people who truly understand both the grace and the discipline of forgiveness, a community that loves its “enemies” and welcomes strangers, a community that breaks down the dividing walls of hostility and preaches “peace to those who were far off. This is what Christ did, and this is what those who bear his name should also do.”³⁴

In the next chapter, we explore the development of the prison system from ancient to modern times with a particular emphasis on one of the communities of care that was established over 100 years ago in what was then known as Great Britain by a minister who started by simply going to where the prisoners were being released and offering them a good breakfast.

³³ Marshall, “Prison, Prisoners and the Bible,” 15.

³⁴ Marshall, “Prison, Prisoners and the Bible,” 15.

CHAPTER THREE

HISTORICAL FOUNDATIONS

Prisons and jails have been around for as long as there have been human beings on earth. The Bible records the use of prisons by the Egyptian Empire in the Book of Genesis. In the ancient world, prisons were nothing more than holding cells for those who had been condemned by the ruling entity at the time, or they were holding places for those who were indebted to another. Later, prisons became places of punishment where those who had violated their societies' laws were confined to keep them away from the law-abiding. Prisons in the United States and Western European nations have an extensive history, with the use of confinement as a form of punishment dating back to medieval times. Throughout the centuries, scholars and penal reformers have widely documented reform efforts and the shift in punishment philosophies. This shift resulted in corporal punishment methods being abandoned and replaced with incarceration.

During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the confinement of criminals in prisons expanded across the United States and Europe. As the use of prisons as punishment became common practice, penal innovations throughout Europe influenced the development of competing prison discipline systems in the United States. The opposing systems in the United States, in turn, promoted a change in penal practices across Europe. The state of early prison systems was well documented, from first-hand accounts of abysmal conditions in early European prisons to historical examinations of

physical prison structures.¹ Historians and scholars also place great emphasis on reform efforts of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, where authors cite social transformations, ideological shifts, economic changes, and political events that resulted in the widespread use of incarceration that continued in the early twenty-first century.

The 1970s are considered the most pivotal decade in the recent history of prisons, where the United States witnessed a sweeping change in the political climate. This change resulted in a transformation of penal and sentencing policies, which resulted in mass incarceration practices in the United States and, to a lesser extent, in Europe. A substantial amount of scholarly research on trends in the correctional population emerged in the 1990s and 2000s. The consequences of the unprecedented increase in incarceration have also been examined, particularly regarding the large-scale incarceration of minorities.

Around the year 2000, a fundamental shift occurred in the way society thinks about the primary purpose of prisons and jails. Before that time, elected officials saw the principal responsibility of correction agencies and administrators as providing for the care, custody, and control of people who are incarcerated. Today, there is widespread agreement that government has a responsibility to ensure that when people are released to the community from jail or prison, they are less likely to reoffend than they were at the start of their sentence. Although no single event is associated with this change in philosophy, a key milestone stands out. Late in 2004, Congress set to work on the Second Chance Act, which the House and Senate later passed with overwhelming bipartisan

¹ Frank Schmalleger and Cassandra Atkin-Plunk, "Prison History," Oxford Bibliographies, 2015, <https://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780195396607/obo-9780195396607-0189.xml>.

support. Elected officials in the nation's capital had made it clear ensuring people's safe and successful transition from prison and jail to the community was not a partisan issue, but simply good, smart policy, because anything short of that objective would possibly compromise public safety, waste taxpayer dollars, and undermine the well-being and stability of communities.²

For the purposes of this work, the emphasis will be on the efforts of one clergyman in England in the late nineteenth century to effect positive prison and or prisoner reform. The clergyman was named Frederick Brotherton Meyer, a Baptist minister and pastor. Meyer was born in London and educated at Brighton College. Between 1870 and 1895, he held several successful pastorates. During much of Meyer's ministry, he engaged in social work and temperance work. He headed a movement to close saloons, was the force in closing nearly 500 immoral houses, and labored for the reclamation of released prisoners. From 1904 to 1905, he served as president of the National Federation of Free Churches, and thereafter was evangelist for that organization, conducting missions in South Africa and the Far East. For many years he was closely associated with the Keswick Conferences. He died in 1929 at the age of eighty-two.

His family started out well-to-do by Victorian standards, and even though his father suffered an economic setback early in Meyer's youth, they managed to hold onto their position in society as what we would call today middle- to upper-middle-class. His father, also named Frederick, was a successful merchant who came from a line of successful businessmen. His mother was also raised in a family that found success in the

² Council of State Governments Justice Center, "Making People's Transition from Prison and Jail to the Community Safe and Successful: A Snapshot of National Progress in Reentry," Prison Policy, 2017, https://www.prisonpolicy.org/research/recidivism_and_reentry/.

business world.³ They were a devoted Christian couple that was very interested and involved in the spiritual development of their children. The family were members of Bloomsbury Chapel, a leading Baptist church in that day, under the leadership of Dr. William Brock, whose preaching captured young Meyer's attention to the point that he announced to his family at the age of seven that he wanted to be "a minister like Mr. Brock!"⁴ His maternal grandmother, Ann Sturt, was a former Quaker who visited Newgate Prison along with Elizabeth Fry, who was a leading prison reformer in that day. It can be assumed that this influence from a socially conscious, godly grandmother and the spiritual and organizational influences of his mother and father led Meyer to later devote much of his time to recovery and rehabilitation of ex-offenders.

The England that Mayer grew up in was described by Sir Robert Ensor as "one of the most religious (countries) that the world had known."⁵ Beside the Church of England, the official state church, there was a growing number of Baptist and other non-Conformist churches in the country. Most of the poorest parts of the country saw low church attendance.⁶ The England that was proclaimed the most religious was also the same England that had a rigid class system, where the very wealthy and the successful merchant class almost never interacted with the poor, except to hire them for menial tasks. Bob Holman writes:

Victorian Britain witnessed the growth of industrial, commercial and financial organizations which made some citizens very wealthy and provided skilled working class people with improved wages and life styles. There was another

³ Bob Holman and F. B. Meyer, *If I had a Hundred Lives* (Geany House, UK: Christian Focus Publications, 2007), location 93, Kindle.

⁴ Holman and Meyer, *If I had a Hundred Lives*, location 149, Kindle.

⁵ Holman and Meyer, *If I had a Hundred Lives*, location 149, Kindle.

⁶ Holman and Meyer, *If I had a Hundred Lives*, location 145, Kindle.

side. The decline of agriculture, the drift to towns, the growth of the population, led to multitudes of people in very lowly paid and intermittent jobs or no jobs at all. They tended to cram into slum conditions characterized by overcrowding, ill-health and hunger. The suffering of the masses is well documented. A few years before Meyer was born, Frederick Engels completed his classic *The Condition of the Working Class in England*. His collection of statistics, his own astute observations and his readiness to meet, mix with and learn from poor people enabled him to show that unskilled workers faced grueling work conditions, along with wages too small to allow them to save. When unemployment came, they could not pay the rent nor feed their families. The poorest, if not sleeping on the streets, would be fortunate to have one damp room per family. Children were particularly at risk and in Manchester over fifty-seven percent of children of working-class parents died before they were five.⁷

Alcohol abuse was rampant in the poor communities. For many, alcohol was used to escape the pain of not having enough of the necessities to survive. Along with the alcohol came other problems. Again, Holman writes, “With poverty came crime, drink and prostitution...With alcohol cheap and available, it was used by poor people as an escape from intolerable conditions and lives. For some, crime and prostitution were the only ways of obtaining money.”⁸

It would be idealistic to detail that Meyer was moved by the hardships experienced by the poor and working class, and that this empathy drove his desire to become a minister. The truth is that he desired to preach the gospel because, in his own words, “I have had a wish to be a minister for long, how came that wish? God must have put it in my heart... It cannot be for earthly advantage for I have good prospects in life. First, I am saved myself and should wish to save others from everlasting, eternal death.”⁹ In fact, while his parents supported his decision to become a minister, they also insisted

⁷ Holman and Meyer, *If I Had a Hundred Lives*, location 149, Kindle.

⁸ Holman and Meyer, *If I Had a Hundred Lives*, locations 179-181, Kindle.

⁹ Holman and Meyer, *If I Had a Hundred Lives*, locations 189-192, Kindle.

that he learn something of the business world. For that reason, he took a position with Allan Murray, tea merchants. Working in the business world was very enjoyable for the young Meyer, but he never strayed from his stated goal. He did learn at least two valuable things: how to run a profitable business, a skill that would be integral to his ministry among the poor, and enough about teas that he would often make the beverage during the many social teas in which the churches he served participated.

While in college and seminary, Meyer showed a particular gift for connecting with people and evangelism. The churches he served early in his ministry did not appeal to the working class, and Meyer was not satisfied with this situation. Holman writes, “At college he had participated in open air evangelism and in Richmond had attempted to draw outsiders into the church.”¹⁰ Meyer was beginning to realize that the focus on internal church ministry did not fit his idea of ministry that reaches all classes of people. In 1872, he accepted the call to Priory Street Baptist Church in York. Instead of exploring ways to reach the unchurched, he spent his first year dealing with internal matters. During that time, his preaching was drawing larger numbers to the church. He was becoming popular, but there were very few conversions and Meyer did not feel that he was making much of an impact in the community. The following year, Meyer met a man who gave him the inspiration he needed to develop a ministry that would reach the masses.

In 1873, the American evangelist Dwight Lyman Moody and soloist Ira Sankey arrived in England to conduct meetings under the auspices of the YMCA. Although their visit had been planned for the previous year, when they arrived, they found that no meetings had been planned. George Bennet of the York YMCA hastily arranged some

¹⁰ Holman and Meyer, *If I had a Hundred Lives*, location 315, Kindle.

meetings in that area and brought Moody Sankey to Priory Baptist to meet Meyer and used his church for one of the services. This meeting of Moody and Meyer began a friendship that would last for many years. In Moody, Meyer found what he had been looking for: a method for reaching out to the common, ordinary people of the community with the message of salvation through Jesus Christ. In his own words, Meyer says:

The first characteristic of Mr. Moody's that struck me was that he was so absolutely unconventional and natural. That a piece of work had generally been done after a certain method would probably be the reason why he would set about it in some fresh and unexpected way. That the new method startled people was the greater reason for continuing with it, if only it drew them to the Gospel. But there was never the slightest approach to irreverence, fanaticism, or extravagance; everything was in perfect accord with a rare common sense, a directness of method, a simplicity and transparency of aim, which were as attractive as they were fruitful in result.¹¹

The result of this early association with Moody was a realization in Meyer's heart that the masses outside the church could be reached and converted. As Meyer put into practice what he had learned, the membership at Priory went from 114 to 166. This success was not without its difficulties. Disagreements in the church arose because the deacons did not appreciate Meyer's evangelistic tendencies. This led Meyer to consider the idea of moving to another church. He accepted the invitation to pastor Victoria Road Baptist Chapel in Leicester. It was in that community that he began a ministry that would touch the common people and those who were being released from jails and prisons.

When Meyer arrived in Leicester, he immediately started to put into practice what he learned from D. L. Moody. During one of his early services, Meyer gave an invitation for those who wanted to experience conversion to meet him after service. One of the

¹¹ Holman and Meyer, *If I had a Hundred Lives*, location 349, Kindle.

deacons complained that he was turning the church into a “Gospel Shop.”¹² This discouraged the young pastor, and for a while he performed the duties of ministry that were acceptable to the deacons. His preaching still attracted people and the church grew, but Meyer knew in his heart that the people he really wanted to reach were the poor and marginalized of the community. One of the practices that he felt kept the working people away from church was the pew system. This was a popular way to finance church operations. Families or individuals would pay an annual amount for a pew in the church, and the family would occupy the pew during services. It was similar to the reserved seating system that is used in theaters and sporting arenas. This system resulted in the idea that the church was only for those who could afford to attend. The poor and working people of the community felt that they would not be welcome in such an exclusive environment.

Meyer desired to do away with this system and have open seating, where a person could come in and sit anywhere, they wanted without the fear of offending a “paying customer.” He shared his vision with some young men from his church and other churches in the area. The result was that the ministers in the city raised such opposition that he resigned his pastorate. He was ready to leave Leicester when a group of Christian businessmen committed their financial support to him if he would stay and work among the working class. From their support and the people that gravitated to him through his preaching, Melbourne Hall was erected. There, common people were welcomed, and the message was clearly articulated. That was not all, however; Meyer sought to have

¹² Holman and Meyer, *If I had a Hundred Lives*, location 406, Kindle.

continuous ministry going on at the church. “During the week, there were temperance meetings, missionary gatherings, educational classes, and a coffee and reading room.”¹³

Melbourne Hall became a place where over 1,400 people attended worship services and where those who did not fit in with the “proper” Christian folk of other churches found a welcome space. The church became a hub or center which extended its outreach beyond the four walls. At first, Meyer struggled with this idea of community-focused ministry, but soon the results convinced him that God was leading them in the right direction.

This extensive history of both Meyer's life and ministry has been recorded to examine the forces and circumstances that went into formulating his philosophy and practice of ministry. Unlike many of the clergy of his day, Meyer was willing to stretch out beyond the confines of the parish and engage the larger world. He was not satisfied with the maintenance of the status quo church, when there were many people outside the church who needed hope, forgiveness, and new direction. In many ways his ministry was the precursor of some impactful ministries that existed in the twenty-first century. Yet, there is an area of ministry that Meyer tapped into that today's church has not fully embraced. The ministry at Melbourne Hall was about to reach out to what is sometimes called the forgotten missionary field, and it started with the tearful appeal of a hard man's daughter.

The beginnings of Meyer's prison ministry is best described using his own words.

He writes:

It was a little after the commencement of the services in the Museum Buildings, that the work at the prison-gate began in the following way. A young girl who attended our services came to me one day in great distress about her father, who

¹³ Holman and Meyer, *If I had a Hundred Lives*, location 448, Kindle.

was in gaol, and likely to come out on the following morning. She wished me to meet him as he was discharged, and do my best to save him from his bad companions, who would be probably waiting for him. This I readily undertook to do; and it was out of this trivial incident that all the work of which I am to write arose. How often it is that, when we are looking for some great work to do, a little child, as in the old legend of St. Christopher, asks us to carry it across the rushing stream; or a tiny act of ministry is required by some servant or neighbor; and this is the rill which broadens, widens, and deepens into the mighty river on which navies float and merchant vessels pass far up into the land. On the following morning I left my home at a quarter to nine, not without considerable misgivings. It was a cold and dreary winter morning; a heavy mist was hanging over the town, and dripping heavily from the bare branches of the trees in the gardens and public walks. At nine I reached the gaol, and asked through the grating if a man bearing the given name was about to be discharged. Almost to my relief I discovered that he had been transferred to another prison, and that therefore, so far as he was concerned, my errand was in vain. However, I retired across the road, and waited quietly to see the usual method of discharge. In a few moments more the little door in the great nail-studded gates opened, and a man stepped out, looking nervously around him, as if anxious about the welcome which he would receive from the world of men, which had been compelled to banish him from its midst. However, he was not left long in doubt; for from the side of the street where I stood, an interested spectator, two women sped across the road to greet him, one of whom—the elder—bore a long coat, into which she helped him, enveloping him from head to foot; while the other, slenderer and younger, perhaps wife or sweetheart, encircled his neck in a scarlet cloth, and so the two led him away into the public-house close by, and the door swung heavily behind them. Meanwhile, another man had emerged from the prison door, but there was no one to welcome him; and apparently not knowing what else to do, he followed in the wake of the others, across the road, to the public-house.¹⁴

Meyer asked to speak with the warden, or governor, of the prison. He had formulated a plan to escort the newly released men to a nearby coffee house where he would feed them a good breakfast. His intent was to persuade the men to make a formal pledge to abstain from alcohol and try to go straight. On the first day of this experiment, he had five men that walked with him past the public houses and into the coffee house. Consequently, he was able to help some find lodging and work, he helped some re-connect with family members, loaned money to quite a few, and encouraged all of them to give their lives to

¹⁴ Frederick Brotherton Meyer, *The Bells of Is: Voices of Human Need and Sorrow* (New York, NY: Fleming H. Revell, 1894), locations 277-298, Kindle.

Jesus Christ and abandon the lives of substance abuse that led to their incarceration.¹⁵

Meyer writes that, in his time at Leicester involved in this work, he had the opportunity to help an estimated 4,500-5,000 men and women.¹⁶ He was also able to recruit some of the men and women of Melbourne Hall to assist him in this endeavor and was pleased to hear that, after his time in Leicester had ended, others had taken ownership of the ministry and carried it on.

Early on, Meyer realized that feeding people a good meal was not enough to keep them from returning to the cycle of crime and incarceration that so many were used to. There were things that each person needed early on in their reintegration into free society. One was decent shelter, if only for a short period of time. Meyer writes, “If anyone desires to save men or to arrest the process of deterioration in them, they must deliver them from the ordinary common lodging-house.”¹⁷ In those days, one of the cheapest lodgings was a boarding house. Some were fine establishments run by families that had space in their homes that they rented out to lodgers, and most of them included breakfast and dinner. They were close to what are called bed-and-breakfast lodgings today. Those who had little money were forced to stay in “flophouses” which were little more than a small bunk, or space on the floor of a rundown building. Without any oversight, many of these places were breeding grounds for criminal activity and violence. As one writer describes:

These houses are filled with beds from cellar to garret, four, five, six beds in a room; as many as can be crowded in. Into every bed four, five, or six human beings are piled, as many as can be packed in, sick and well, young and old, drunk

¹⁵ Holman and Meyer, *If I had a Hundred Lives*, locations 467-492, Kindle.

¹⁶ Meyer, *The Bells of Is*, location 394, Kindle.

¹⁷ Meyer, *The Bells of Is*, location 459, Kindle.

and sober, men and women, just as they come, indiscriminately. Then come strife, blows, wounds, or, if these bedfellows agree, so much the worse; thefts are arranged and things done which our language, grown more humane than our deeds, refuses to record.¹⁸

Addiction to alcohol was another issue that Meyer attempted to deal with. Meyer estimated that in 90% of the cases with which he worked, substance abuse was the main reason that men and women ended up in prison. “Heavy drinking, once condoned in the public schools and among the professions, by 1870 was distinctly frowned upon. Intemperance, moreover, was increasingly seen to be linked, whether causally or otherwise with other social evils such as poverty, crime, gambling, and prostitution.”¹⁹ Meyer spent a lot of energy persuading those discharged from detention to sign a pledge card as a first step in realizing that they had a deeper spiritual need.

In dealing with the newly released, Meyer often had access to prisoners’ “rap sheets” or the record of their crimes. He noted that, in many instances, being drunk was the precursor to many crimes. Sometimes the people he interviewed revealed that they had been so drunk that they did not even remember committing the offense. Meyer believed that the pledge card, which included a promise to abstain from alcohol, simply solidified the decision that the ex-offender made when they realized their state of incarceration was due to the influence of both alcohol and the association of “evil” companions. In fact, it was Meyer's continual goal to influence his charges to accompany him toward a new life rather than return to old friends, habits, and behaviors.²⁰

¹⁸ Friedrich Engels, *Condition of the Working Class in England* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1958), 38.

¹⁹ John Greenway, “The Drink Problem in Early Victorian Britain, 1830–70,” in *Drink and British Politics since 1830* (London, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1057/9780230510364_2.

²⁰ Meyer, *The Bells of Is*, Kindle.

Another thing that Meyer realized the newly released needed was a job, or a legitimate way to make money. He started trying to meet this need by networking with the various factory owners, merchants, and shopkeepers in the area to secure employment for the ex-offenders. Before they would start their jobs, Meyer would secure adequate clothing for the jobs and to protect them during cold and rainy weather. Most of the time, he would get what he needed from the various charities that accepted donated clothing from the well-to-do to distribute to the poor. Many times, he would come out of his own pocket to buy a man a decent suit and shoes.

Meyer was to discover soon that the men and women who are discharged from prison were given, what today is called “gate money,” a small amount which is meant to help them with transportation and meals. It is not a lot of money, the assumption being that the newly released will have someone to meet them and somewhere to stay. On this first outing, he found that the newly released were more often than not met at the gate by friends or associates who would lead them into the nearest public house (pub) where they would spend their gate money on drinks. Given that most of the crimes committed by these men and women were either committed while under the influence of alcohol or to obtain money to purchase alcohol, it was easily apparent to Meyer that the newly released were being steered to reenter the way of life that had gotten them into trouble in the first place. Meyer partnered with the local Prisoner’s Aid Society on the idea that the society would get and hold the mark money with which the ex-offender left prison, with the person’s permission. That money would be used to help with clothing, shelter, the purchase of tools or a peddler’s license, or whatever the immediate need of the person to start them on a pro-social pathway. Later, after the ex-offender began to flourish and

continued to abstain from alcohol, the Society returned the money to them with interest so that the reformed person would have a “nest-egg” with which they could buy a home or secure better housing, purchase equipment for a growing business, or even marry and begin a family.

One of the things that Meyer did in his efforts to help the ex-offenders find employment was that he approached the local businessmen and manufacturing companies to either rehire a former employee or to consider his charges for hire. Meyer describes his efforts:

I endeavored to find work for my protégés by going with them to various manufacturers that were known to me, and to others who were not so well known. And I will say with gratitude, that I was received with uniform kindness; and in many cases every endeavor was made to help me. But it was not entirely satisfactory – partly because the heads of the firms left their departments almost entirely to their managers, with whom they did not care to interfere; and partly because it was often prejudicial to a workman to seem too entirely under the patronage of “a parson.” Besides this, I had no opportunity of keeping in touch with men who needed my help and guidance. And, in addition, it consumed so much of my time to go round the town from one to another, waiting to see those who could help me.²¹

He also fretted that in securing employment, many of his charges would drift away from the godly influence that he and his partners were exerting on them and would eventually end up where he found them, drunk and in prison. The solution was to start his own “cottage industries.” He began by financing a firewood venture, which consisted of two men cutting wood into usable sizes, bundling them together, and selling them to businesses and residences.²² In a short time, he realized that the need for jobs was greater than he could satisfy by these efforts. It was at this juncture that he decided that a larger

²¹ Meyer, *The Bells of Is*, location 906, Kindle.

²² Meyer, *The Bells of Is*, Kindle.

operation was needed. He found out about a yard and workshops that were being put on the market for lease for 100 pounds per year. The location was a fifteen-minute walk from Meyer's house. After receiving a providential assurance from God and a twenty-pound donation from a friend, Meyer signed the lease and set to work building what he called "Providence House."²³ Here was where the men and women that Meyer was trying to help could not only work, but also have a place to live. Meyer and his team built workstations, dormitories, cooking stations, and a chapel on the site. Melbourne Hall was greatly involved, supplying furnishings and bedding, and some of the congregation helped with supervising and mentoring the men and women who were living there.

Soon after establishing this work, Meyer encountered the kind of opposition that endures today whenever an effort to help and house ex-offenders is proposed or started in a community. The homeowners around the site began to complain about the proximity of their homes to the "criminals" living and working there. They feared for the safety of their families and that their property values would decrease. As time went on, these fears were allayed, especially as the community would open their windows in the evening to hear the men and women singing praises to God during their chapel services.²⁴ More opposition came from the operators of the public houses in the town. Because of Meyer's efforts, men and women were being redeemed both spiritually and socially. They were reuniting with families, securing, and holding jobs, paying their bills, feeding their children, attending church, and abstaining from alcohol. This caused the revenue of the public houses to shrink significantly.

²³ Holman and Meyer, *If I Had a Hundred Lives*, location 507, Kindle.

²⁴ Holman and Meyer, *If I Had a Hundred Lives*, Kindle.

When Meyer first began his work “at the prison-gate,” the proprietor of the public house directly across from the prison would send out mobs of men to intimidate Mayer and compel the newly released to spend their gate money on drinks. As this tactic did not dissuade Meyer or stop the work he was doing, they sought another way to stymie him. After Meyer started the firewood business, they saw their chance. They banded together with other merchants in the area and succeeded in persuading them to boycott buying any firewood from Providence House. Soon, sales began to slack off and Meyer feared that his endeavor would fail. After committing the matter to God, he continued operations. Amazingly, business began to pick up and the boycott was broken. Later, when Meyer asked why the boycott did not work, he was told that people began buying their wood again because it was considered cleaner and of better quality than the wood that the merchants tried to sell instead of Meyers.²⁵

Providence House and the wood cutting business were not the only ventures that Meyer started to help the newly released. He instituted a window washing business as a short-term employment situation and a kind of messenger and errand service for the older ex-offenders who could not do the harder work. He also recounts that he worked with homeless boys of the city. At first, they were housed at Providence House, but later, a house was purchased and staffed by a kindly couple from Melbourne Hall as a kind of group home for the children. As child labor laws were not as strict then as they are now, the boys were placed in jobs at the various manufacturing plants in the area. They were provided clothing, room, and board, which they paid for with part of their weekly earnings. The rest of the money they made was set aside to cover operating costs and to

²⁵ Meyer, *The Bells of Is*, location 1021, Kindle.

provide them with “seed money” when they came of age and left the home. Meyer writes that after his departure from Leicester:

This Boys’ Home still flourishes, and is the means of starting many a young lad on the upward path. After spending three or four years in the Home, the lads are able to take lodgings for themselves; and it is a great pleasure, from time to time, to hear tidings of their welfare.²⁶

There are several lessons to be learned from examining the ministry of F. B. Meyer as it relates to his work with ex-felons and the implications of that work on today's reentry efforts. Meyer believed in a mostly hands-on approach. He was not satisfied with leaving men and women who had just been released from jails and prisons to the care of the state or county. To be sure, there existed government agencies at that time that were charged with the welfare of the poor, indigent, and the newly released ex-felon. This amounted only to the dispersal of small amounts of cash, then it was up to the person to find the charities that provided clothing, food, or a place to stay. The temptations to return to the life of crime and substance abuse that led to their incarceration met them at the front doors of the prison or jail upon release. Meyer's personal intervention, and later, the men whom he inspired to help him in the work, interrupted the cycle that led men and women in and out of jail. His advice was to become more personally involved in their lives and to befriend them to walk them through to a new life. Renata Cobbs Fletcher, Jerry Sherk, and Linda Jucovy write:

Research has demonstrated that carefully structured, well-run mentoring programs can positively affect social, behavioral and academic outcomes for at-risk young people. Research has also shown how mentoring works—through the

²⁶ Meyer, *The Bells of Is*, location 1115, Kindle.

development of a trusting relationship between the young person and an adult mentor who provides consistent, nonjudgmental support and guidance.²⁷

What worked for young people in this study seems to have worked for Meyer with men and women of various ages.

The task of lifting men, women, and children from the cycle of poverty, substance abuse, and incarceration was more than just a pet project of Meyer's. He involved the entire congregation of his church. There were members that accompanied him to the jail to help with that initial breakfast and the signing of the pledge card. Members of the congregation donated clothing and other materials to help, and many became involved in the business ventures that Meyer started, supervising the men as they worked. Later, his congregation got involved with the formation and operation of Providence House and the Boy's Home, from supplying bedding, curtains, and other materials to make the place a little cozier, to volunteering to help with the worship and prayer meetings, to actually working alongside the men and women and supervising their activities.

Meyer learned that to have the greater impact and the best outcomes of his work among the newly released, he needed to make personal connections with them. The other thing he realized was that reentry was more than housing, food, clothing, and a job. It was getting the people plugged into a loving community that met the need for companionship, friendship, accountability, and forgiveness. Meyer also realized that for the church to reach this segment of society, he and his congregation would have to show that they were an open community, where they welcomed and served people who were not members of the local assembly. Omar Roberts describes it as "the type of fellowshiping that

²⁷ Renata Cobbs Fletcher, Jerry Sherk, and Linda Jucovy, "Mentoring Former Prisoners: A Guide for Reentry Programs," Public/Private Ventures, 2009, <https://ccsme.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/Mentoring-Former-Prisoners.pdf>.

deliberately leaps across the cognitive line between church and street – that might link a recently released offender to a religious community and its services, thus forming a node (or, rather, a knot) in a sacred safety net.”²⁸

This “sacred safety net,” as Roberts describes it and as F. B. Meyer practiced it, was not designed to catch people, and hold them to the local assembly. There were cases in Meyer’s ministry where some of his charges “backslid” and returned to their former criminal behaviors. Others chose to leave the area and travel far from where they had been incarcerated to start fresh. The point to these contacts was not to build the membership of the church, although that did happen in many cases. The goal was ultimately to point them to Christ, to have them allow God to provide the inner transformation that would lead to outer behavioral change.

²⁸ Omar M. Roberts, “Religion, Reform, Community: Examining the Idea of Church-Based Prisoner Reentry,” The Urban Institute’s Reentry Roundtable, March 2002, <https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/60756/410802-Religion-Reform-Community.PDF>.

CHAPTER FOUR

THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

The idea of the community church assisting community or reentry organizations with the shepherding and mentoring of newly released inmates raises some significant theological questions. What is a theological framework in which one can locate this work? Who examined this topic in light of practical Christian ethics and practice? Where can one find a solid theological foundation that would ground the local church's efforts in the community?

Any framework for understanding the church's response to and responsibility for the ex-offender's successful return to society should be rooted in the overarching role of the faith community in the life of the community. This would include not only issues relating to prisons, prisoners, and ex-offenders, but also their families. Many people returning from incarceration are coming home to poverty, inadequate housing options, lack of affordable healthcare, scarcity of employment opportunities, or underemployment including not being able to earn a living wage, access to mental health assistance, and a myriad of other social and economic problems.

Many would think that the obvious choice for a theological framework would be Liberation Theology. This framework emphasizes "social concern for the poor and

political liberation for oppressed peoples.”¹ Beginning in the 1960s after the Second Vatican Council, Liberation Theology became the model for political engagement and resistance for Latin American theologians such as Gustavo Gutiérrez, Leonardo Boff, and Jesuits Juan Luis Segundo, and Jon Sobrino. It also came to embody the church’s mandate to care for the poor and marginalized. Kira Dalt writes:

One of the major developments in Catholic social teaching in the 20th century has been the preferential option for the poor. The option for the poor is simply the idea that, as reflected in canon law, “The Christian faithful are also obliged to promote social justice and, mindful of the precept of the Lord, to assist the poor.” It indicates an obligation, on the part of those who would call themselves Christian, first and foremost to care for the poor and vulnerable

The phrase “preferential option for the poor” was first used in 1968 by the superior general of the Jesuits, Father Pedro Arrupe, in a letter to his order. The term was later picked up by the Catholic bishops of Latin America. In its early usage, particularly, the option for the poor referred especially to a trend throughout biblical texts, where there is a demonstrable preference given to powerless individuals who live on the margins of society. The liberation theology movement fully embraced the concept, particularly when they closely associated the poor and vulnerable with Jesus himself, citing Matthew 25, “Whatever you did for the least of these, you did for me.”²

Gutiérrez wrote about Christian base communities where lay members of the Catholic church would assume some of the pastoral care functions due to a lack of priests being available in rural, often isolated areas. He saw these communities as the wellspring from which revolution and transformation could take place. Kimberly Humphrey writes:

Gustavo admired the strength of faith which he witnessed in the base Christian communities. When he encountered these communities, he realized that these poor Christians were expressing a theology of political action and community which Gustavo felt he was only being to understand. The Christian base communities, which operated mostly without the presence of a priest, contained the threat of restructuring the organization of the Church. They spoke of a place in

¹ Chris Cook, ed., *Dictionary of Historical Terms*, 2nd ed. (New York, NY: Gramercy Books, 1998), 203.

² Kira Dault, “What is the Preferential Option for the Poor,” *U. S. Catholic* 80, no. 1 (January 2015): 46.

which theology worked from the bottom up, contradicting the traditional hierarchy that works top down. The Christian base communities could be seen as a place where the Church is no longer needed, and the particularity of the Church is lost; the Catholicism of the base communities could be interpreted as a Catholicism that is in name only and has no connection to the Church in practice. Gutiérrez, however, saw the Christian base communities as the foundation for theology. According to Gutiérrez, these base communities were beginning to formulate a theology as they reflected upon their evangelizing actions as a faith community. This process demonstrated the poor's ability and right to think—the poor affirmed this right which they are so often denied in their discussions on God and faith. The resulting theology, therefore, is not one of an individual but of the entire community, and it expands itself to include the entirety of the Church.³

Liberation Theology, however, is not without its difficulties. One of the critiques of Liberation Theology is that it encourages resistance of the poor against and entrenched political and economic hierarchy. While non-violent resistance against oppression has long been lauded for its moral and social efficacy, there have been recorded instances where proponents of Liberation Theology have advocated violent resistance. In Nicaragua, for example, much of the resistance against the Somoza regime came from the grassroots efforts created by the base communities that were important to the rise of Liberation Theology. Throughout the revolutionary struggle, the opponents to the corrupt establishment government, the Sandinistas, had the grassroots support of clergy who were influenced by the reforming zeal of Vatican II and dedicated to the previously discussed preferential option for the poor. Many of these poor communities were established where clergy and laity partnered in consciousness raising initiatives to educate the peasants about the institutionalized violence, they were suffering. Some priests took a more active role in supporting the revolutionary struggle. For example,

³ Kimberly Anne Humphrey, "Gustavo Gutierrez's Liberation Theology: Traditional Catholicism from the Perspective of the Afflicted Poor," *Denison Journal of Religion* 10, no. 2 (2010), <http://digitalcommons.denison.edu/religion/vol10/iss1/2>.

Father Gaspar García Laviana took up arms and became a member of the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN).

Many who started with the ideas of Liberation Theology have ended up espousing some form of Marxism. Cardinal Alfonso Lopez Trujillo writes that Liberation Theology relied too much on conflict rather than reconciliation to further its ends.⁴ Another reason for not including this theology in the overall framework of this project is that though there are elements of oppression and exclusion that those who are released from prison have to deal with, and though there are policy issues that need to be addressed in order to establish a more just system of justice, overthrow of the existing government is not necessary. What is necessary is to change the structures within the criminal justice system that reflect a commitment to restoration of individuals and communities. Based on this premise Liberation Theology does not meet the criteria for meaningful social change within the criminal justice system. The theological foundation of reentry of ex-offenders in general, and specifically that the church has the moral obligation to come alongside the newly released to help them transition, can be found in another movement within the Christian community in the United States, the Social Gospel of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

According to the “social gospelers,” God is not only interested in the salvation of the individual, but God is also interested in the redemption of the social structures in which the individual lives. They asserted that as God is a God of Love, God is also the God of social justice. This meant that as humanity responds individually to the preaching of the gospel of Christ in the form of a “new birth,” a new birth of righteous action meant

⁴ Arthur F. McGovern, *Liberation Theology and its Critics: Toward an Assessment* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1989), 48.

to bring wholeness to the community, the economy and the political structures of society should accompany this “new birth.” For them, Christianity “is most Christian when religion and ethics are viewed as inseparable elements of the same single-minded and wholehearted life, in which the consciousness of God and the consciousness of humanity blend completely.”⁵ As Walter Rauschenbusch noted, “The social problems are moral problems on a large scale. Religion is a tremendous generator of self-sacrificing action.”⁶

The world in which the Social Gospel emerged was the time generally known as the Gilded Age. This period in American history started roughly after the Civil War and continued into the early twentieth century. Rapid economic, technological, political, and social transformation marked this period. Technological innovations of the time included the telephone, skyscraper, refrigerator, car, linotype machine, electric lightbulb, typewriter, and electric motor, as well as advances in chromolithography, steel production, and many other industries. These inventions provided the bases for modern consumerism and industrial productivity.⁷

The United States economy rose at the fastest rate in its history, with real wages, wealth, GDP, and capital formation all increasing rapidly. By the beginning of the twentieth century, per capita income and industrial production in the United States led the world, with per capita incomes double those of Germany or France, and fifty percent higher than those of Britain. The businessmen of the Second Industrial Revolution

⁵ Walter Rauschenbusch, *A Theology for the Social Gospel* (New York, NY: The MacMillan Company, 1917), 14, Kindle.

⁶ Walter Rauschenbusch, *Christianity and the Social Crisis in the Twenty-First Century* (New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers Ltd., 2007), 5, Kindle.

⁷ Vincent P. De Santis, “The American Gilded Age Revisited,” *Australian Journal of Politics and History* 29, no. 2 (1983): 357-358.

created industrial towns and cities in the Northeast with new factories and hired an ethnically diverse industrial working class—many of them new immigrants from Europe. The corporation became the dominant form of business organization, and a managerial revolution transformed business operations. The public labeled super-rich industrialists and financiers such as John D. Rockefeller, Andrew W. Mellon, Andrew Carnegie, Henry Flagler, Henry H. Rogers, J. P. Morgan, Cornelius Vanderbilt of the Vanderbilt family, and the prominent Astor family as “robber barons,” because they felt these persons cheated to get their money and lorded it over the common people. Their admirers argued that they were “captains of industry” who built the core America industrial economy.⁸ Herbert Spencer’s theory of Social Darwinism, which justified laissez-faire capitalism, ruthless competition, and social stratification influenced many business leaders.⁹ This philosophy taught that those who were wealthy and powerful were naturally suited for their position, that they were the “fittest” and should survive or lead. This philosophy characterized the poor as the weakest and were to be pushed aside. Spencer believed that those who were successful were so because of superior breeding. Being superior, according to Spencer, the “good people” would advance civilization into peaceful industrial societies, while the “unfit” poor would slowly become extinct. This attitude showed the belief that the under-class was not worth investing in through education, better living conditions, higher wages, or good health care. De Santis writes:

Much of the reasoning of Social Darwinism was found in the other dominant theory of the times-laissez-faire, which included ideas of the classical economists going back as far as Adam Smith’s *Wealth of Nations* (1776). Beyond what was

⁸ Howard Zinn, “Robber Barons and Rebels,” *A People’s History of the United States* (New York, NY: Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2005), 253–95.

⁹ Sean Cashman, *America in the Gilded Age*, 3rd ed. (New York, NY: New York University Press, 1993), 42.

necessary to maintain law and order and to protect life and property, the government was not to interfere in the conduct of business or in personal matters. According to this view, those pursuing their business interests free from government meddling would achieve the best possible use of resources, would promote steady economic progress, and would be rewarded, all according to their deserts. Acquisition of wealth was considered evidence of merit, for did not wealth come as a result of frugality, industriousness, and sagacity? Poverty carried the stigma of worthlessness, for did it not result from idleness and wastefulness? During most of the late nineteenth century these attitudes prevailed in America and were upheld by prominent educators, editors, clergymen, and economists.¹⁰

Tichi also describes the Gilded Age in stark and unflattering terms. She writes:

Millions worked long hours for wages and salaries that barely covered expenses. Charitable food donation programs expanded in both periods. Housing shortages and unaffordable rents forced many into crowded, substandard dwellings, while homeowners who missed mortgage payments faced foreclosure. Whether they were low-income workers, managers, or professionals, Americans...lived in dread of the sudden, massive job losses that rupture lives. Short of labor strikes, the industrial workers in the first Gilded Age had no say in their terms of employment.¹¹

In many ways, twenty-first century America is repeating the social inequalities, the exploitation of the working class, and the disregard of the extremely wealthy for the plight of the poor and disenfranchised that characterized the so-called Gilded Age. The Social Gospel sought to apply Christian ethics to social problems, especially issues of social justice such as economic inequality, poverty, alcoholism, crime, racial tensions, slums, unclean environment, child labor, inadequate labor unions, poor schools, and the danger of war.

Theologically, the proponents of the movement sought to put into practice a visible conception of the kingdom of God. The verse of scripture most associated with

¹⁰ De Santis, "The American Gilded Age Revisited," 361.

¹¹ Cecelia Tichi, *Civic Passions: Seven Who Launched Progressive America (and What They Can Teach Us)* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), xiv.

this conception is what is commonly referred to as the Lord's Prayer, specifically in Matthew where it reads "Thy kingdom come; Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven" (Mt. 6:10 KJV). For them the kingdom of God presented an opportunity to preach a gospel of both personal and social salvation. Robert Handy notes that the chance afforded Rauschenbusch and the social gospelers to incorporate this evangelical concern for the salvation of individual souls with the desire for social redemption. The kingdom of God, he writes, "brought together his evangelical concern for individuals and his social vision of a redeemed society."¹²

The concept of the kingdom became the centerpiece of the Social Gospel. Rauschenbusch writes, "This doctrine is itself the social gospel. Without it, the idea of redeeming the social order will be but an annex to the orthodox conception of the scheme of salvation."¹³ Jesus himself proclaimed that the kingdom would grow outward only because of the inward growth of the kingdom. Individuals must be saved before any society can truly be saved, but just because persons are saved does not mean a society is saved.¹⁴ This two-fold goal rests upon the foundation of the kingdom. Rather than an apocalyptic and sudden appearing of Jesus to initiate the kingdom, the Social Gospel proponents declared that since Jesus declared that "the Kingdom of God is within you," speaking specifically of the Christian church, then it is the task of the church to be the visible expression of kingdom rule and action in the earth. Being postmillennial, they

¹² Robert T. Handy, ed., *The Social Gospel in America* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1966), 255.

¹³ Rauschenbusch, *A Theology for the Social Gospel*, 131.

¹⁴ Walter Rauschenbusch, *The Righteousness of the Kingdom*, ed. Max L. Stackhouse (New York, NY: Abingdon, 1968), 102.

held that as people and social structures began to conform to biblical principles, the kingdom of God would gradually dawn in humanity.

Important leaders of the movement included Richard T. Ely, Josiah Strong, Washington Gladden, Alice Hamilton, Julia Lathrop, Florence Kelly, Ida B. Wells-Barnett, and Walter Rauschenbusch. While the others wrote extensively about the need for social reforms, workers' safety, the right to organize, child welfare, and the role of the State in the economic and social uplift of the working class, Gladden and Rauschenbusch championed the idea of the church getting involved in social reform as a matter of moral conviction. Gladden preached, wrote, and lectured on the idea that Christianity should be, "lived out in service to others."¹⁵ Gladden encouraged his congregation to follow his distinctive contributions:

1. The principle of equality in the Christian brotherhood, exemplified in a democratic polity. 2. The ideal of the church as a body for all people, regardless of wealth or class. 3. The promotion of education and popular intelligence. 4. The furtherance of liberty, equal rights, public order and improvement, political purity, and general progress...¹⁶

If Gladden was called the prophet of the Social Gospel then Walter Rauschenbusch would have to qualify as its best-known thinker. Rauschenbusch attempted to construct a theological framework for the movement. His premise is that Jesus Christ came to save not only the individual soul but also to redeem the social structures and institutions that are a part of those structures. The main criticism he had of the Christian institutions of his day was that they focused so much on personal salvation that they ignored the need for

¹⁵ Timothy Ahrens, "Washington Gladden: Prophet of Truth and Justice" (speech, Greenlawn Cemetery, Columbus, OH, October 1, 2011), First Church, <https://www.first-church.org/Downloads/gladdengreenlawnspeech.pdf>.

¹⁶ Pierre Jacobs, "The Social Gospel Movement Revisited: Consequences for The Church," *HTS Theologies Studies/Theological Studies* 71, no. 3 (August 31, 2015): 3, <http://dx.doi.org/10.4102/hts.v71i3.3022>.

social salvation. The Social Gospel concerned itself with folding Christianity and social issues into one another. Rauschenbusch's conception of the divine was that God is active in history, bringing about God's reign in the world of humankind. He argued that Christianity must be a revolutionary faith and one invested in politics and social concerns. To do this effectively, Rauschenbusch stated that religion concerns itself with all levels of daily life from the larger political and economic issues, to the effects of those issues in everyday interactions. Rauschenbusch saw Christian churches as largely unsuccessful on this issue. For the most part, churches did not take part in a major "social reconstruction," but instead engaged in small acts of "suppression." This meant that while the churches tried to hide some of their most blatant prejudices, churches never made a sufficiently ambitious attempt to put an end to such evils for good.¹⁷ He writes:

The individualistic gospel has taught us to see the sinfulness of every human heart and has inspired us with faith in the willingness and power of God to save every soul that comes to him. But it has not given us an adequate understanding of the sinfulness of the social order and its share in the sins of all individuals within it.¹⁸

Rauschenbusch's theological stance grew out of his experience with his congregation in Hell's Kitchen in New York. His church was in a poor section of the city and many of the people to whom he ministered were working class German immigrants who were oppressed, living in "squalid five-story tenements that pressed more than twenty families into each building."¹⁹ His concern for his flock and the conditions in which they lived and worked caused him to realize the message of individual salvation and the promise of

¹⁷ Amanda Conley, "Walter Rauschenbusch and the Social Gospel," *Denison Journal of Religion* 9, no. 5 (2010): 61-63.

¹⁸ Rauschenbusch, *A Theology for the Social Gospel*, 5.

¹⁹ Gary Dorrien, *The Making of American Liberal Theology: Idealism, Realism, and Modernity. 1900-1950* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), 82.

eternal life did little to address the issues with which they lived on a daily basis. He brought the religious philosophies of his inherited evangelicalism to this new context and found that these ideas did not fit the situations of the people to whom he ministered. He found that he had to look for answers outside of the church's establishment. He writes:

This is one of the saddest things that I can say, but I cannot get it out of my mind...the church held down the social interest in me. It contradicted it; it opposed it; it held it down as far as it could; and when it was a question about giving me position or preferment, the fact that I was interested in the workingman was actually against me.²⁰

Rauschenbusch advocated not for a departure from orthodox Christian faith, rather he sought to reinterpret Christianity to broaden its reach. His effort was to link personal salvation with the realization that after personal conversion, a person is then awakened to the need of redemption for the social order. He writes that the Social Gospel is the next step in the evolution of religion as sincere people of faith sought to express their heartfelt convictions in the real world. He writes:

Religious experience reacts on theology. Consider the men who have turned theological thought into new channels — Paul, Augustine, Luther, Fox Wesley, Schleiermacher. These were all men who had experienced God at first hand and while under the pressure of new problems. Then they generalized on the basis of their experience. Paul, for instance, had borne the weight of the Law; he had found his own efforts futile; he had found Christ gracious, free, and a power of life. On this experience he built his theology. A like experience under Catholic legalism enabled Luther to understand Paul; he revitalized the Pauline theology, built a theology of emancipation on that, and threw out of religious practice and thought what was not in agreement with his experience and its formula. The rank and file of us have no genius and can not erect our personal experience into a common standard. But our early experiences act as a kind of guide by which we test what seems to have truth and reality. We select those theoretical ideas which agree with our experience, and are cold to those which have never entered into our life. When such a selective process is exercised by many active minds, who all act on the same lines, the total effect on theological thought is considerable. This is a kind of theological referendum, a democratic change in theology on the basis of religious experience. Connect these two propositions: that an experience

²⁰ Robert T. Handy, ed., *The Social Gospel in America* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1966), 266.

of religion through the medium of solidaristic social feeling is an experience of unusually high ethical quality, akin to that of the prophets of the Bible; and second, that a fresh and clearly marked religious experience reacts on theology. Can we not justly expect that the increasing influence of the social gospel and all that it stands for, will have a salutary influence on theology? The social gospel has already restored the doctrine of the Kingdom of God, which held first place with Jesus but which individualistic theology carefully wrapped in several napkins and forgot. Theology always needs rejuvenation.²¹

Many argued that theology of the social gospel minimizes the need for personal salvation.

Richard Siders argues:

Rauschenbusch bluntly insists that the social gospel “plainly concentrates religious interest on the great ethical problems of social life. He belittles “trust in the vicarious atonement of Christ” as rigid dogma and insists that the social gospel has little interest in metaphysical questions about the Trinity or deity of Christ, not to mention Satan. For the social gospel, “its chief interest is concentrated on those manifestations of sin and redemption which lie beyond the individual soul.” Whereas “the nonethical practices and beliefs in historical Christianity nearly all center on the winning of heaven and immortality,” Rauschenbusch gladly predicts that “the more the Social Gospel engages and inspires theological thought, the more will religion be concentrated on ethical righteousness.” This kind of tragically one-sided focus on the ethical aspects of Christian faith significantly contributed to one of the greatest divisions in twentieth-century Christianity.²²

However, Rauschenbusch defends his position by saying that the kingdom of God concerns itself not with individual salvation alone, but he agrees with Albrecht Ritschl who believes that:

The objective ground on which he bases his system is the religious experience of the Christian community. The “immediate object of theological knowledge is the faith of the community,” and from this positive religious datum theology constructs a “total view of the world and human life.” Thus the essence of Ritschl’s work is systematic theology. Nor does he painfully work up to his master-category, for it is given in the knowledge of Jesus Christ revealed to the

²¹ Rauschenbusch, *A Theology for the Social Gospel*, 20-21.

²² Ronald J. Sider, *Good News and Good Works: A Theology of the Whole Gospel* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing Group, 1993), 9, Kindle.

community. That God is love and that the purpose of His love is the moral organization of humanity in the “Kingdom of God.”²³

Rauschenbusch took several of the themes of Systematic Theology and reinterpreted them for the Social Gospel. He applied a public and societal framework to what was an individualistic and personal hermeneutic. For example, the biblical foundation for the Social Gospel is the kingdom of God. For the social gospelers this was more than the rule of God in the individual souls of humans, but it is also the overarching sovereignty of God in the social order. God is to be king of Wall Street as well as king of heaven. God’s rule is to be known both in the humble houses of the poor and the lofty houses of political and economic power. Sin for the Social Gospel Theology is not only individuals failing to meet the standards of God’s righteousness, but it is a selfishness that leads people to act in their own interest with no regard for others. Rauschenbusch writes:

Sin is not a private transaction between the sinner and God. Humanity always crowds the audience-room when God holds court. We must democratize the conception of God; then the definition of sin will become more realistic. We love and serve God when we love and serve our fellows, whom he loves and in whom he lives. We rebel against God and repudiate his will when we set our profit and ambition above the welfare of our fellows and above the Kingdom of God which binds them together.²⁴

For Rauschenbusch, individual sins matter, but far less than the sins of collective society. War, poverty, inhumane working conditions, child labor, substandard housing, and the amassing of wealth by the few at the expense of the many were the sins against which the Social Gospel stood. These actions that a society takes in opposition to the kingdom of God “block and destroy the Reign of God in which He might fully reveal and realize

²³ *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 11th ed., s.v. “Ritschl, Albrecht.”

²⁴ Rauschenbusch, *A Theology for the Social Gospel*, 48.

Himself.”²⁵ Jesus says that the kingdom of God is “with us” (Lk. 17:21 NLT). God is not far away in heaven merely looking down on humanity. God is actively involved with humanity. God works through humanity to bring about God’s kingdom. Sin, therefore, retards the spread of the kingdom. Rauschenbusch wrote “Our sins against the least of our fellow-men in the last resort concern God...”²⁶ For many of the social gospelers, the greatest sin was selfishness that manifested in an insatiable greed to accumulate wealth or power instead of pursuing justice, peace, and working for the common good of all people regardless of class. Dr. William J. Barber, a contemporary minister actively involved in twenty-first century social justice, speaks about the five sins or injustices that plague America, which is systemic racism, systemic poverty, environmental devastation, the war economy, and the false narrative of religious nationalism.²⁷

The critics of the Social Gospel charged that its proponents concerned themselves more with the conditions of the social order than with the salvation of individual souls. Many critics accused the social gospelers of being political socialists. Others asserted that they fell under the sway of Karl Marx. While Rauschenbusch and Gladden did identify with many socialist ideals, they both came short of declaring allegiance to socialism as a viable alternative to American capitalism. Gladden observed, “If I were shut up to the alternatives of Individualism with its fierce survival of the strongest and Socialism with

²⁵ Rauschenbusch, *A Theology for the Social Gospel*, 49.

²⁶ Rauschenbusch, *A Theology for the Social Gospel*, 49.

²⁷ Jordan Blakey, “Rev. Dr. William J Barber II and Jonathan Wilson-Heartgrove on ‘The Heart and Soul of Democracy,’” *The DePauw*, April 13, 2019, <https://thedepauw.com/rev-dr-william-j-barber-ii-and-jonathan-wilson-h3artgrove-on-the-heart-and-soul-of-democracy/>.

its levelling tendencies, I should take my stand with the Socialists...”²⁸ Gladden also wrote “We ought to favor state action whose purpose it is to improve the condition of the poorest and least fortunate classes...the real motive of Socialism.”²⁹ Gladden considered the individualistic capitalism, as practiced in his day, as a scourge to the poor and working class. Rauschenbusch aligned himself more closely with socialist groups than Gladden, but he never fully committed to the socialist movement. He was wary of the possibility of the loss of individual freedoms, the tendency of socialism to weaken the family and love of country, a proclivity to expect sudden change through force, and a “‘practical materialism’ that overemphasized ‘improved arrangements and facilities.’”³⁰

Contemporary critics accused social gospellers of basically ignoring African Americans and women’s hopes for justice, equality, and desegregation in the late nineteenth century. The charges had some merit, since the fathers of the Social Gospel were White, Protestant men of middle-class background and professional standing who viewed the issues of their day from their own particular cultural context. Social Gospel writers were also labelled as middle-class reformers whose vision of the shortcomings of North American society was superficial, and whose “prescriptions for social reform were moralizing rather than structural, revisionary rather than radical.”³¹

²⁸ Jacob H. Dorn, “The Social Gospel and Socialism: A Comparison of the Thought of Francis Greenwood Peabody, Washington Gladden, and Walter Rauschenbusch,” *Church History* 62, no. 1 (1993): 88, <https://corescholar.libraries.wright.edu/history/26>.

²⁹ Dorn, “The Social Gospel and Socialism,” 88.

³⁰ Dorn, “The Social Gospel and Socialism,” 92.

³¹ James A. Dombrowski, *The Early Days of Christian Socialism in America* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1936), 26.

One of the downfalls to the organized sustainability of the Social Gospel movement was the view that humanity would largely accept the claims of Christ, repent from individual and societal sins, and begin to build the kingdom of God in the earth. The revivals of Christian piety during the third Great Awakening caused many to believe that a new era of a redeemed social order was at hand. The storm clouds of World War I, and the death of Walter Rauschenbusch in 1918 would do much to undermine the cause of the Social Gospel. Also, in reaction to both socialism and the Social Gospel, a new fundamentalism arose that re-emphasized personal conversion and individualistic piety over transformation of social structures.

Though Rauschenbusch and the Social Gospel's influence began to wane soon after the "Great War" his impact has had far-reaching effects. Robert Handy writes, "His life and ideas have long continued to exert an influence in theological and ethical thought and action, notably through the Niebuhr brothers and Martin Luther King, Jr, but through many others as well."³² Many of the ideals of Social Gospel Theology inspired Dr. King during the Civil Rights Movement and are parts of the foundations of both Liberation Theology and Black Liberation Theology.³³

This foundation showed how the theology of the Social Gospel gives a foundation for the church's role in actively advocating for the poor, the disenfranchised, and the forgotten. One of the areas that Rauschenbusch did not address was the plight of the ex-offender returning to society after incarceration. The extent of his contribution with the

³² Robert T. Handy, "Walter Rauschenbusch," *Makers of Christian Theology in America*, ed. Mark G. Toulouse and James O. Duke, 341-347 (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1997), 347.

³³ T. Howland Sanks, "Liberation Theology and the Social Gospel: Variations on a Theme," *Theological Studies* 41, no. 4 (December 1, 1980): 668-682, <https://doi.org/10.1177/004056398004100402>.

plight of offenders was to bring attention to the community's involvement in allowing the conditions to exist that lead a person into criminality. He wrote:

The community is *particeps criminis* with the individual in almost every sin that is committed. The girl who drifts into shame because no happy marriage is open to her; the boy who runs into youthful criminality because he has no outlet for his energies except the street...—they can justly turn against us all and say, “You have led us into temptation.”³⁴

Many in Rauschenbusch's day believed that those who engaged in criminal behavior were willing participants in “the depraved quality of life unfolding in the urban enclaves of the underclass.”³⁵ In recent years, the idea that the criminal justice system needs to focus on recidivism gained momentum. Many law enforcement and criminal justice experts understand that in order to reduce the likelihood of formerly incarcerated persons returning to prison, there must be intervention during incarceration and support after its conclusion. In a survey of prison chaplains, the Pew Research Center found that many chaplains would like to see programs that would include some level of mentoring for the inmate and their families, beginning at some point before release and extending to a significant period of time after release.³⁶

The theological emphasis of the Social Gospel is that the church should be ready and willing to come alongside the “least of these” to bring a measure of justice and relief from oppression and to give returning citizens an opportunity to rebuild their lives in a positive environment. Many times, however, churches find it difficult to minister to these

³⁴ Rauschenbusch, *Christianity and the Social Crisis in the Twenty-First Century*, 294.

³⁵ Rauschenbusch, *Christianity and the Social Crisis In the Twenty-First Century*, 275-280.

³⁶ Pew Research Center, “Religion in Prisons-A Fifty-State Survey of Prison Chaplains,” Pew Research Center, March 22, 2012, <https://www.pewforum.org/2012/03/22/prison-chaplains-views-on-correctional-system/>.

individuals because of latent fears and prejudices that Christians have about ex-offenders.

Returning citizens need restoration. Barkman writes:

Restoration to relationship within the prison church is only a first step. Restoration of relationships with family, with society in general through release, and ultimately by inclusion in the churches in the community needs to also be understood as included in the restoration of the relationship with God.³⁷

Unfortunately, many reentry efforts are limited to three main goals, which are housing, employment, and substance abuse/mental health counseling. While these goals are a necessary part of a newly released citizen's path to reintegration into society, these do little to address a fundamental need for positive accountability that can interrupt the cycle of fear and discouragement that often drives ex-offenders to recidivate. McRoberts writes that many churches that are interested in prisoner reentry are focused on restored citizens experiencing individual religious conversions to facilitate restructuring of their lives toward more prosocial aims. Their belief is that humanity is flawed, that prison does not change the fundamental issue of sin in the individual, and that real change can only happen when a person experiences personal conversion after release. These churches are looking to take the individual out of the negative environment to which they often return and introduce them to the community of believers where they find prosocial associations and activities. They operate in what McRoberts calls the moral reform approach.³⁸ Churches that implement the moral reform approach promote qualities in society that empower people to do for themselves that which government cannot or will not do.

³⁷ Linda Lee Smith Barkman, "Towards a Missional Theology of Prison Ministry," *International Journal of Pentecostal Missiology* 5 (September 2017): 43, <https://agts.edu/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/38-53-Barkman-Theology-of-Prison-Ministry.pdf>.

³⁸ Omar McRoberts, *Religion, Reform, Community: Examining the Idea of Church-based Prisoner Reentry* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago, 2002), 4.

Other churches realize that part of the problem of recidivism lies with the punitive structure of the criminal justice system. Their aim is a radical overhaul of the way society deals with offenders from incarceration to parole to release. These are the churches and organizations that advocate for those who have little power over the policy decisions that directly affect their own welfare. Neither of these two approaches is better than the other. Many religious communities are called to do both kinds of work. They possess a deeply rooted conviction that the gospel compels them to pursue the welfare of the “least of these.”

There are many religious communities that suggest a third alternative. Their idea is that personal evangelism often includes involvement in social action. A group like Prison Fellowship mainly concerns itself with the religious conversion of prison inmates to Christianity. However, the organization initiated some community outreaches to minister to the families of the incarcerated and lobbied legislature to enact policies that make transition from prison to community less problematic. In one publication, the organization detailed some of the reforms that they have taken to Congress. They include addressing the lack of proportionality in sentencing guidelines for property and drug crime, reducing unduly long mandatory minimums, increasing probation opportunities for appropriate candidates, and adapting punishment methods for technical probation violations. Such reforms also include promoting community corrections, reinvesting achieved savings into a more functional infrastructure of community corrections, reducing collateral consequences by measures like restoring voting rights, and

implementing fair-chance hiring policies for public employees.³⁹ Their approach recognizes that successful reentry involves a desire for the newly released to change individually as well as providing the social infrastructure to aid in supporting the personal change within the larger community.

³⁹ Prison Fellowship, “Criminal Justice Trends,” Prison Fellowship, 2017, <https://www.prisonfellowship.org/download/criminal-justice-trends/?wpdmdl=28421&refresh=5edfa578a269f1591715192/>.

CHAPTER FIVE

INTERDISCIPLINARY FOUNDATIONS

Prior to this chapter, this document examined the biblical, historical, and theological foundations for the premise that the involvement and mentorship of churches and individual Christians in the reentry of criminal justice involved individuals is crucial for their successful reintegration into society.

Upon returning to the community, a number of challenges to becoming a member of the community confronts offenders. The challenges range from economic and psychological obstacles to sociological barriers. With nearly seventy percent of offenders returning to prison within three years, the Department of Justice encouraged a new assessment of reentry processes to improve community crime reduction effects. The focus is on the offender returning from prison back into the community. The question confronting program designers is how to build reentry processes that reinforce the message of accountability and individual responsibility, while also attending to the issues regarding the offender regaining legitimacy in society. Although this idea is not new, in recent years criminal justice organizations, legislatures, and justice advocates increasingly emphasized examining the effectiveness of helping newly released individuals with reintegration into society.

Jeremy Travis, in his book *But They All Come Back*, documents the fact that unless an inmate dies while incarcerated, he or she will eventually be released back into

society.¹ A reported ninety-five percent of state prisoners will eventually be released, and nearly 700,000 individuals each year leave state and federal prisons.² The entire jail population will eventually be released or transported to a state or federal institution. However, nearly two-thirds of the individuals released will be rearrested within three years.³

The idea of rehabilitation in criminal justice has a long history. Van Ness and Strong write:

The legal systems that form the foundation of Western law did not view crime simply as a wrong to society. Although crime breached the common welfare so that the community had an interest in – and responsibility for – addressing the wrong and punishing the offender, the offense was not defined solely as a crime against the state, as it is today. Instead, it was also considered an offense against the victim and the victim’s family. Consequently, offenders and their families were required to settle accounts with victims and their families in order to avoid cycles of revenge and violence. This was true in small non-state societies, with their kin-based ties, but attention to the interests of victims continued after the advent of states with formalized legal codes. The Code of Hammurabi (c. 1700 b.c.e.) prescribed restitution for property offenses, as did the Code of Lipit-Ishtar (1875 b.c.e.). Other Middle Eastern codes, such as the Sumerian Code of Ur-Nammu (c. 2050 b.c.e.) and the Code of Eshnunna (c. 1700 b.c.e.), provided for restitution even in the case of violent offenses. The Roman Law of the Twelve Tables (449 b.c.e.) required thieves to pay double restitution unless the property was found in their houses, in which case they paid triple damages; for resisting the search of their houses, they paid quadruple restitution. The Lex Salica (c. 496 c.e.), the earliest existing collection of Germanic tribal laws, included restitution for crimes ranging from theft to homicide. The Laws of Ethelbert (c. 600 c.e.), promulgated by the ruler of Kent, contained detailed restitution schedules that distinguished the values, for example, of each finger and its nail. Each of these diverse cultures retained an expectation that offenders and their families should

¹ Jeremy Travis, *But They All Come Back: Facing the Challenges of Prisoner Reentry* (Washington, DC: Urban Institute Press, 2005), location 113, Kindle.

² E. Ann Carson and William J. Sabol. “Prisoners in 2011,” Bureau of Justice Statistics, U.S. Department of Justice, December 2012, <http://bjs.ojp.usdoj.gov/content/glance/tables/corr2tab.cfm>.

³ Nicolette Bell et al., *Pennsylvania Department of Corrections Recidivism Report 2013* (Camp Hill, PA: Pennsylvania Department of Corrections, 2013), 1.

make amends to victims and their families – not simply to ensure that injured persons received restitution but also to restore community peace.⁴

During the eighteenth century, philosophers such as Jeremy Bentham and Cesare Beccar began to bring attention to the reform of convicted criminals in prisons. They believed that offenders needed a chance to become morally pure to reduce crime. Since at least 1740, some philosophers began thinking of solitary confinement as a method for creating and maintaining spiritually clean people in prisons. As English people immigrated to North America, so did these theories of penology.⁵

Some of the first structures built in English-settled America were jails, and by the eighteenth century, many English North American counties had a jail. These jails served a variety of functions such as a holding place for debtors, prisoners-of-war, and political prisoners, those bound in the penal transportation and slavery systems, and those accused but not tried for crimes. Sentences for those convicted of crimes were rarely longer than three months, and often lasted only a day. The poor were often imprisoned for longer than their richer neighbors, as bail was rarely not accepted.⁶

One of the first prisons in America was founded in 1790 by the Pennsylvanian Quakers. The Quakers wanted something that was less cruel than dungeon prisons. They created a space where prisoners could read scriptures and repent as a means of self-

⁴ Daniel W. Van Ness and Karen Heetderks Strong, “A Brief History of Restorative Justice: The Development of a New Pattern of Thinking,” in *Restoring Justice: An Introduction to Restorative Justice*, 5th ed. (New York, NY: Routledge, 2015), 6, <https://sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/B9781455731398000029>.

⁵ Adam J. Hirsch, *The Rise of the Penitentiary: Prisons and Punishment in Early America* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1992), 23.

⁶ Hirsch, *The Rise of the Penitentiary*, 8-10.

improvement.⁷ The introduction of new concepts of the prison system, such as parole, indeterminate sentencing, and probation followed the Civil War and during the Progressive Era of America. These soon became mainstream practices in America. At this time, crime increased causing officials to handle crime in a more retributive way. However, as the crime rate declined, they started to focus more on rehabilitation.

Some note Albert Eglash as the first person to use the term “Restorative Justice” in 1958 in a series of articles, where he described three types of criminal justice. He writes that they are “(1) retributive justice, based on punishment; (2) distributive justice, based on therapeutic treatment of offenders; and (3) restorative justice, based on restitution.”⁸ He noted that both the retributive and distributive models focused exclusively on the actions of the offender. They deny participation of victims in the justice process and require only passive participation from the offender. In the 1970’s, some in Canada and in the midwestern United States began setting up the first victim-offender reconciliation programs.

At the core of Restorative Justice, is an interest in involving victims, offenders, and communities in a new philosophy and practice of criminal justice that is anchored in three major streams of ideas and activism, which are social movements of the 1960s, particular practices and programs, and academic research and theories. The criminal justice field recognized early in the previous decade that the system was in crisis. With the increasingly high numbers of individuals being released from jails and prisons as well as an increase in the number of people involved with the system without incarceration

⁷ Valerie Jenness, “The United States Prison System History,” Valerie Jenness, August 27, 2016, <https://valeriejenness.com/history-of-the-united-states-prison-system/>.

⁸ Van Ness and Strong, “A Brief History of Restorative Justice,” 23.

(probationers and those in deferment programs), scholars and experts realized the insufficiency of the current level of rehabilitation and reentry resources to meet the need or significantly impact the lives of returning citizens.⁹ Although correctional systems made significant strides in recent years by providing reentry services to individuals, these services often begin at the tail end of the offender's sentence rather than at the outset. Also, the community and legal services organizations that provide extensive reentry assistance find that these services are often fragmented. This results in many agencies shouldering the burden of working these issues alone and in isolation.¹⁰

Recently the way the criminal justice system looks at the release and reentry of ex-offenders shifted away from retributive justice and toward restorative justice. Restorative justice "incorporates a strong human rights analysis that emphasizes the factors of race and class in the over-incarceration of people."¹¹ Restorative justice sees crime as "a violation of people and relationships."¹² Restorative justice assumes that the people most affected by crime – both victims and offenders – should have the opportunity of involvement in resolving the conflict. The goals of restoring losses, allowing prisoners to take responsibility for their actions, and helping victims move beyond their sense of

⁹ Michael Pinard, "A Reentry-Centered Vision of Criminal Justice," *Federal Sentencing Reporter* 20, no. 2 (2007): 103-109, <https://ssrn.com/abstract=1106266>.

¹⁰ Pinard, "A Reentry-Centered Vision of Criminal Justice," 104.

¹¹ Insight Prison Project, "What is Restorative Justice," Insight Prison Project, <http://www.insightprisonproject.org/a-restorative-justice-agency.html>.

¹² Helen Bowen and Jim Consedine, eds., *Restorative Justice: Contemporary Themes and Practice* (Lyttelton, New Zealand: Ploughshares Publications, 1999), 18.

vulnerability stand in sharp contrast to the conventional focus on past criminal behavior and increasing levels of punishment.¹³

This method, restorative justice, recognizes the damage of both the victim and offender. For the victim, the damage may be loss of property, loss of physical ability, loss of life, or the life of a loved one. Such damage also includes loss of a sense of security, loss of peace of mind, loss of privacy in some cases, as well as the loss of time and resources. Criminal behavior also brings damage and loss to the offender. Offenders lose freedom, resources, and contact with families as a result of crime. They also experience the damage that incarceration or having a criminal record inflicts. This damage includes collateral consequences such as loss of voting privileges, limited options for residence, difficulty securing employment, and the loss of valuable and prosocial relationships. Restorative justice asks this question on behalf of victim and offender, “how can this damage be repaired?”¹⁴

There are many models of restorative justice. All of them have similar steps in achieving their goals. Some of the steps in accomplishing the goals of restorative justice include these points: “Crime causes harm and justice should focus on repairing that harm. The people most affected by the crime should be able to participate in its resolution. The responsibility of the government is to maintain order and of the community to build peace.”¹⁵ Other models include additional points of importance such as:

- Crime is injury.

¹³ Insight Prison Project, “What is Restorative Justice,” <http://www.insightprisonproject.org/a-restorative-justice-agency.html>.

¹⁴ Bowen and Consedine, *Restorative Justice*, 12.

¹⁵ Centre for Justice and Reconciliation, “Lesson One: What is Restorative Justice,” Centre for Justice and Reconciliation, <http://restorativejustice.org/restorative-justice/about-restorative-justice/tutorial-intro-to-restorative-justice/lesson-1-what-is-restorative-justice/#sthash.NjDmizWq.dpbs>.

- Crime hurts individual victims, communities, and juvenile offenders and creates an obligation to make things right.
- All parties should be a part of the response to the crime, including the victim if he or she wishes, the community, and the juvenile offender.
- The victim's perspective is central to deciding how to repair the harm caused by the crime.
- Accountability for the juvenile offender means accepting responsibility and acting to repair the harm done.
- The community is responsible for the well-being of all its members, including both victim and offender.
- All human beings have dignity and worth.
- Restoration – repairing the harm and rebuilding relationships in the community – is the primary goal of restorative juvenile justice.
- Results are measured by how much repair was done rather than by how much punishment was inflicted.
- Crime control cannot be achieved without active involvement of the community.¹⁶

Although the previous example is part of a model designed for juvenile offenders, the main principles can easily apply to adult offenders as well. In the program that I facilitate as a Case Manager in one of Ohio's prisons, there are four main objectives for the inmates that participate. First, there is Acknowledgement where the inmate comes to acknowledge that the inmate's criminal behavior harmed the victim, the victim's family, the community, the offender's family, and the offender. Next, is Accountability where the offender takes responsibility for the offender's actions that caused the harm. In other words, instead of blaming the victim, or the influence of drugs and or alcohol, or the idea

¹⁶ Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, "OJJDP Report: Guide for Implementing the Balanced and Restorative Justice Model," Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, <https://ojjdp.ojp.gov/library/publications/guide-implementing-balanced-and-restorative-justice-model>.

that it was a case of “wrong place, wrong time,” this program brings the offender to the place of realization that he or she alone is responsible for the harm done. The offender often demonstrates this in sessions when the offender says, “I committed” a certain crime rather than saying “I caught a case.”

After Accountability comes Apology where the offender expresses remorse for the actions that caused harm and asks for forgiveness. The offender does this by writing a letter of apology to the victim or the victim’s family. The letter is submitted to the Office of Victim Services where, if the victim is registered with the office and specifically asks if an apology letter has been written, someone provides them with a copy of the letter. This is done with the knowledge that the victim may not be able or willing to forgive. In cases where the victim dies as a result of the offender’s actions, the apology is made to the victim’s family, again with the realization that the victim’s family may never express forgiveness. Last is making Amends, where the offender can show that he or she determined to walk a new path that includes involvement with prosocial behaviors and people, and to give back to the community in an effort to undo the damage that their criminal behavior caused. Within the institution, offenders participating in prosocial and community service activities, earning their GED, completing job training, enrolling in college, substance abuse/mental health programming, and maintaining an adherence to all institutional rules and regulations can demonstrate this determination.

One of the most specific attributes of restorative justice is that the community is a distinctive crime stakeholder with an interest in or responsibilities towards crime. This model offers a situation in which victims, offenders, and the relevant community can participate together actively in the resolution of matters arising from the crime. The

premise of this view is that crimes and crime responses are conceived in terms of social conflict taking place within the wider community. Therefore, the community's role is not only to achieve reparation of harm and reduction of recurring offenses but also to reap the opportunities for moral development and community-building.¹⁷ This perspective promotes a shift of responsibility to the individual citizen and local communities. This means that the community takes responsibility for the resolution and prevention of crime demands, given that punishment is not sufficient to "solve" the crime problem.

Through restorative justice, crime control is "'communized,' because crime is 'a problem that has to be coped with by all the members involved and not by professionals who are in fact outsiders.'" ¹⁸ This local control enables communities to understand and act upon the underlying causes of crime to promote community well-being and to prevent crime. The community offers at the same time a new setting in which to reframe the crime and its consequences, the community becomes a recipient of restoration along with the victim, and the community offers a collective response to crime.¹⁹ This approach gives voice to victims and communities by bringing them into the process and involving them in the solution.

There are two recurrent types of community involvement and participation in restorative justice. The first type is inviting the direct stakeholders' networks (victim/s

¹⁷ Gerry Johnstone, *Restorative Justice: Ideas, Values, Debates* (Devon, UK: Willan Publishing, 2002), xi.

¹⁸ Paul McCold, "Restorative Justice and the Role of Community," in *Restorative Justice: International Perspectives*, ed. Burt Galaway and Joe Hudson (Monsey, NY: Criminal Justice Press, 1996), 85–101.

¹⁹ George Pavlich, "What Are the Dangers as Well as the Promise of Community Involvement?" in *Critical Issues in Restorative Justice*, ed. Howard Zehr and Barb Toews (Monsey, NY: Criminal Justice Press, 2004), 173–183.

and offender). The second type is including community representatives (e.g., volunteer facilitators). The first option requires community involvement because the crime either victimizes it or the community can contribute by attending to the consequences of a crime. By including the victim and offender networks, it is possible to discuss the offense, get answers to their questions, and agree how the offender can repair some of the harm caused or, more generally, to deal with the aftermath of the offense and any implications for the future. The participation of the stakeholders' networks is the expression of an inclusive approach to crime control that aims to strengthen community involvement and confidence in the criminal justice system.

The second option, to engage community representatives, is meant to enable community members to play a part in “searching for local solutions and making the system more responsive locally.”²⁰ Community involvement and participation can also mean the inclusion of volunteers who have been engaged from many sections of society with good understanding of local cultures and communities, and the inclusion of those who are able to represent wider community interests in the process. *Criminal Justice: The Way Ahead* states that these practices “increase awareness of the important role of the individual and the community in preventing and handling crime and resolving its associated conflicts.”²¹ This reasoning is tied to the aim of “reconstructing criminal justice practice in order to be responsive at every stage to the needs of the victims and the

²⁰ Giuseppe Maglione, “Communities at Large: An Archaeological Analysis of the ‘Community’ Within Restorative Justice Policy and Laws,” *Critical Criminology* 25, no. 3 (2017): 453-469.

²¹ Secretary of State for the Home Department by Command of Her Majesty, “Criminal Justice: The Way Ahead” (paper presented to Parliament, February 2001), <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/criminal-justice-the-way-ahead>.

law abiding community.”²² From this perspective, some think laypeople are better than criminal justice professionals at certain tasks, such as reintegration of offenders and communicating sympathy for victims.

Secondly, involving the community in the handling of criminal conflicts between its members is seen as a way of empowering those communities. Citizen participation in this process can help develop strong and active communities and improve community cohesion. Maglione writes that, “Community involvement/participation is then strategic to the ‘creation of community capital’ i.e., to ‘the increase public confidence in the criminal justice system and other agencies with a responsibility for delivering a response to anti-social behavior.’”²³

Traditionally, church volunteers entered jails and prisons to “minister to the fallen,” but many churches around the country encourage their parishioners to move beyond correctional ministries into mentoring relationships that begin in prison or jail and continue after release. Some churches stand ready to “adopt” individuals after release. In Miami Dade County, Florida the Faith Works! Aftercare Program is built around partnerships with approximately 600 faith volunteers, 120 local houses of worship, the Archdiocese of Miami, and the Aleph Institute. Through these partnerships, the Aftercare Program established “church release,” which is a court-approved short-term release that allows individuals to attend their local houses of worship each week with their faith mentors and families.

²² Secretary of State for the Home Department by Command of Her Majesty, “Criminal Justice,” <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/criminal-justice-the-way-ahead>.

²³ Maglione, “Communities at Large,” 453-469.

Former Nixon aide and convicted felon Charles “Chuck” Colson founded Prison Fellowship, one of the largest non-profit organizations, in 1976. He served seven months in federal prison for his part in the Watergate break in and cover-up. In 1973, just before he entered the criminal justice system, he experienced a radical Christian conversion. During his time in prison, Colson became increasingly aware of what he saw as injustices done to prisoners and shortcomings in their rehabilitation. When he was granted a three-day furlough to attend his father’s funeral, he discovered that he and his father had shared a keen interest in prison reform. He became convinced that he was being called by God to develop a ministry to prisoners with an emphasis in promoting changes in the justice system.

The organization Colson founded became one of the leading voices in prison reform, restorative justice, and prisoner advocacy. Prison Fellowship was involved in lobbying for passage of the FIRST STEP (Formerly Incarcerated Reenter Society Transformed Safely Transitioning Every Person) Act, which brought reforms to the federal prison system and seeks to reduce recidivism.²⁴ Included in the language of this legislation is Title V, which reauthorizes The Second Chance Act of 2007 and makes amendments:

- to rename, revise, and reauthorize grant programs for technology career training demonstration projects and reentry mentoring services;
- to reauthorize offender reentry research and the grant program for offender reentry substance abuse and criminal justice collaboration;
- to reauthorize and modify eligibility for an elderly offender early release pilot program; and

²⁴ Samuel Smith, “Prison Fellowship Praises Democrats Who Voted for Reform Bill Backed by Trump White House,” *Christian Post*, May 23, 2018, <https://www.christianpost.com/news/prison-fellowship-house-democrats-voted-first-step-act-reform-bill-trump-white-house.htm>.

- to repeal grant programs for the responsible reintegration of offenders and the study of Depot Naltrexone to treat heroin addiction.
- It amends the federal criminal code to establish partnerships between prisons and faith- or community-based nonprofit organizations to conduct activities to reduce recidivism.²⁵

Prison Fellowship staff and volunteers provide programming inside prisons to help prepare men and women to leave prison with a positive outlook, and with the tools that help them to be ready to succeed. In numerous facilities, they offer mentorships, life-skills training, marriage and parenting classes, and other programs that teach personal responsibility, the value of education and hard work, and care for people and their property, so that prisoners are prepared to thrive in their communities after release. In some institutions, they run faith dorms, where incarcerated men and women live and participate in biblically-based training within a nurturing Christian community.

Outside of the prison system, Prison Fellowship advocates for the rights of victims and just treatment of returning citizens. They lobbied for the dismantling of the system of collateral sanctions – the laws and regulations that bar many formerly incarcerated individuals from securing housing, finding decent employment, obtaining occupational licensure, furthering their education, voting, obtaining a driver’s license, and many other barriers to successful reentry.²⁶ Recently, in a blog promoting the month of April as “Second Chance Month” Prison Fellowship wrote:

For far too many who have served time behind bars, release from incarceration brings a new kind of prison. Some 65 million Americans have a criminal record. This limits their access to jobs, education, housing and other things necessary for a full and productive life. Any hope and new identity found while incarcerated can

²⁵ U.S. Congress, Senate, First Step Act of 2018, S. 756, 115th Cong, Congress.gov, March 29, 2017, <https://www.congress.gov/bill/115th-congress/senate-bill/756/text>.

²⁶ Prison Fellowship, “Senate Resolution Names April 2018 as Second Chance Month,” Prison Fellowship, April 27, 2018, <https://www.prisonfellowship.org/category/advocacy/page/5/>.

be quickly lost upon release when faced with the “second prison” – the more than 48,000 documented social stigmas and legal restrictions that inhibit opportunities to rebuild someone’s life after paying a debt to society.²⁷

These social stigmas and legal restrictions often force a person to return to a life of criminal behavior. There are, however, programs and people in place that intend to disrupt that cycle and at least soften the social stigmas that hamper success. The faith community has long been an important force in improving public safety and promoting neighborhood revitalization. In fulfilling their mission to lift up those in need, faith-based institutions historically provided counseling and other vital services to prisoners, victims, and community members affected by crime. Unlike their secular counterparts, many faith-based organizations are often uniquely suited to bring together residents and local leaders to address pressing challenges and to empower people to improve their lives, the lives of their family members, and their communities at large.

Many reentry programs focus on one of the four basic needs that returning citizens have as they transition back into society, which include finding suitable residential options, obtaining sustainable employment, accessing substance abuse and/or mental health counseling, and getting adequate healthcare. Many returning citizens need more. They need to reconnect with their communities and families and get involved with prosocial people and activities that encourage positive, non-criminal thinking and activity. Hundreds of reentry programs exist throughout the United States. Some are small local efforts of nonprofit agencies and others are large-scale federal programs. Of these programs, the most common relationship is a collaborative relationship. Within the collaborative relationship, complementary and supplementary relationships occur—both

²⁷ Prison Fellowship, “Senate Resolution Names April 2018 as Second Chance Month,” <https://www.prisonfellowship.org/category/advocacy/page/5/>.

exclusively and simultaneously.²⁸ In his 2004 State of the Union Address, President George W. Bush addressed the issue of prisoner reentry by proposing a \$300 million initiative to reduce recidivism and help prisoners reintegrate into their communities. The initiative was designed to “harnesses the resources and experience of faith-based and community organizations in providing newly released prisoners with job training and placement services, transitional housing, and voluntary mentoring support.”²⁹ Many of these programs are successful because, while they emphasize one or more of the identified areas of need for ex-offenders, they build relationships between mentor and offender that often start while the offender remains incarcerated. Bassford writes:

Ex-offenders need an extra level of support – the kind of support that includes accountability to refrain from substance abuse and guidance to maintain emotional and mental stability. For these reasons, partnerships with faith-based organizations seem sensible. The faith-based community has much experience with offering such guidance and is presently involved with many social welfare endeavors.³⁰

The mentoring and sponsoring that extends beyond an offender’s incarceration into the community often reinforces the lessons learned in prison and helps returning citizens find an anchor to stabilize what would be an otherwise tumultuous return to society. Another example of such a program is The IMPACT Family counseling program. IMPACT Family Counseling is a non-profit, non-denominational Christian counseling agency providing professional counseling services to “at-risk” youth and their families in Birmingham, Alabama since 1991. The organization began as a grass-roots initiative, led

²⁸ Bridgette Bassford, “The Role of Faith-Based/Government Partnerships in Prisoner Reentry,” *SPNA Review* 4, no. 1 (2008), <http://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/spnareview/vol4/iss1/2>.

²⁹ Bassford, “The Role of Faith-Based/Government Partnerships in Prisoner Reentry,” 1.

³⁰ Bassford, “The Role of Faith-Based/Government Partnerships in Prisoner Reentry,” 1.

by community leaders John A. Williamson and C. Molton Williams, to intervene and prevent youth from entering a life of crime. IMPACT became a United Way agency in 1999. IMPACT Family Counseling provides programs and services to all persons regardless of race, color, national origin, disability, age, sex, creed, economic status, or limited English proficiency. IMPACT's U-Turn program includes three weeks of intensive coursework and is designed to empower individuals with skills for all of life including parenting, relationship education, economic stability, and career readiness. Participants spend most of their time in a classroom environment composed of instructors lecturing, group exercises, guest speakers, and break out groups. Additionally, case managers work one-on-one with each individual for twelve weeks to help develop goals and plan for the future.

The question becomes, where does the local faith community fit in this? In the Christian tradition, Matthew 25:35-40 speaks to the involvement of the people of God in the care of those who are experiencing trauma including the trauma of incarceration. Here Jesus, in the role of the millennial king is commending those disciples for going to the hungry and thirsty, the naked and the stranger, and the sick and imprisoned and meeting their needs. He indicates that such service to those in need is service to him. It is important to note that those that have been served by the Christian community are those who have no power or resources to reciprocate to the serving community. All of the needy groups mentioned in the scripture form the underside of society. They were discounted and disregarded when it came to benefits that may have been available. In our modern context, the needy described in the text are those who would normally benefit from the services available within the society's social services safety net. However, in the

passage the onus is not on the state to provide these services, but for the people of God to go and see about these least. God is not commending a social service program or a political solution. The king commends members of the Christian community that seek out and serve the others. Those who are being released from prison are encouraged to take advantage of the resources within that network. The problem is that although accessing these services is an important first step, the newly released is interacting with a system that is designed to point toward other systems that provide material resources but not human connection. The system encourages compliance to rules and rewards this compliance with physical, economic, and behavioral resources, but does not walk with the individual providing emotional and spiritual support. Matthew 25:35-40 shows that it was human interaction, human care, and concern that God is pleased with. They make themselves available before they make the resources available. The people of God “see” the person who is in need. This “seeing” acknowledges the personhood of the other. The meeting of the need is secondary to the priority of recognizing the humanity of the person. Jesus is encouraging his followers to go to those who have been marginalized and affirm their personhood and value in addition to providing material resources. This brings several questions to mind that, the answers to which may lead to greater ministry opportunity in the community. Some of the questions that may be answered are: Is the church aware of the need that exists with returning citizens finding positive role models to help them navigate the reentry process? In the light of Jesus’ expectation that the disciples go and see about those in prison how many churches sponsor any type of prison ministry? Are pastors aware of any returned citizens that are in their congregations? If so, what services or needs have these individuals, or their families specifically requested

from the church or faith community? Would churches or church-based volunteers be open to sponsoring or facilitating small group or one-on-one mentoring sessions with returning citizens? The answers to these questions would help to shed light possibly of the faith community coming alongside newly returning citizens to help them be successful in their transition from prison to community.

The church's historic role in effective reentry was best illustrated in the life of English clergyman Frederick Brotherton Meyer, who during the course of his unique ministry in Leicester, England helped thousands of men and women to develop new lives in the aftermath of criminal activity and incarceration. From the simple beginnings where he simply met men and women at the door of the jail and fed them breakfast to establishing a firewood business, a window washing service, and a messenger service to give them jobs, and meeting with them formally for worship and, with the assistance of many of his church members, meeting with them informally for prayer, conversation and helping them with clothing and other necessary items, he brought hope and demonstrated the love of God to the newly released and to the community where they were released.

Although Meyer did not actively seek out members of the community that were harmed by the ex-offenders' actions to participate in their reintegration, he did seek the community's help with giving them some of the resources that they needed to be successful. The breakfast house, where he started bringing the people for their first meal in freedom, soon began to support Meyer's work. Merchants in the city donated items such clothing and shoes so that the men and women could work, they donated tools and equipment for the various business ventures, and they became customers, utilizing the services that Meyer and the newly released offered. Meyer put together a network of

concerned individuals and businesses that redirected the lives of many of the newly released. This fusion of the church and community working together to help ex-offenders has proven to be a powerful tool to reduce recidivism. The model that Meyer developed did several things. First was the recognition that rehabilitation and reentry cannot be accomplished in a vacuum. There must be involvement from outside the facility and even the returning citizen's close circle of contacts. If it was possible to affect their lives, then it should be possible to affect the same kind of change today.

In the same way that F. B. Meyer's work changed the social climate in Leceister, England, the Social Gospel was a movement being birthed in the United States around the same time that would change the way the faith community saw the work of the church. While Meyer concentrated on the redemption and reclamation of individuals and their families, the Social Gospel was concerned with the salvation of the entire community. The focus was on the cities where poverty, disease, overcrowding, and worker exploitation were rampant. The social gospelers believed that it is the church's mission to address these needs on a personal level, feeding the hungry, clothing the naked etc., but they also believed that they needed to raise their voices in the halls of political power to advocate for changes in the way the system treated the less fortunate.

Although the Social Gospel did not address the issue of ex-offender reintegration, the idea that the church has a role to play in their successful transition from prison to community is apparent. The main thrust of the Social Gospel is the transformation of societal systems and institutions. Elements of this can be seen in recent years as the criminal justice system moves from solely punitive to rehabilitative, and from focusing on internal reentry processes toward more involvement from the community.

Many churches are willing to venture behind prison walls to preach and teach.

There is a need for such service in a system where the religious needs are so great, but the resources are few. The real need is for advocacy and partnership with reentry organizations to provide what many of them cannot, such as mentorship, personal accountability, and exposure to pro-social people and activities.

Reginald A. Wilkinson was the director of the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction from 1991 until his retirement in 2006. He helped to steer the department toward a more restorative model of criminal justice in this department. A journal article that he co-authored reads:

Released offenders view themselves as being “in” but not “of” society and that some would rather accept a prison sentence than to be subjected to loss of autonomy in the community. What is lacking is the positive reinforcement or acknowledgement from criminal justice and community entities that released offenders have a role to play in society; that they are more than merely liabilities to be supervised. Prison reform through offender reentry involves a shift from the historical fragmentation between not only each criminal justice component, but the community as well. All too often each entity has perceived offenders from a past-oriented rather than future-oriented reference point. Although public safety dictates knowledge of past criminal history, reentry cannot succeed in a backward-looking mindset. By the addition of a restorative justice component to reentry, offenders are provided an orientation toward their future by taking responsibility willingly, which in turn, sends a message to the community that offenders are worthy of further support and investment in their reintegration process.³¹

While still director of the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Corrections, Dr.

Wilkinson began moving the department away from a retributive form of criminal justice toward a more restorative model. His plan included assessing offenders upon entering the prison to determine their criminogenic needs and addressing those needs through

³¹ Reginald A. Wilkinson, Gregory A. Bucholtz, and Gregory M. Siegfried, “Prison Reform Through Offender Reentry: A Partnership between Courts and Corrections,” *Pace Law Review* 24, no. 2 (2004): 609.

programming throughout the course of their incarceration. His plan also included encouraging offender families to become more involved in their rehabilitation and reentry, the establishment of significant discharge planning, employment readiness training, and career planning both in the prisons and within the parole regions.

Furthermore, Wilkinson's plan included the establishment of Citizen Circles, which is a collaboration of parole and probation departments with business and community leaders, faith-based organizations, and interested private citizens brought together to meet with and support the returning citizen in his or her reentry.

Wilkinson also helped to develop the Faith-Based Advisory Council that was formed to link institutions and parole offices to connect prisons and prisoners to the community.³² These programs and ideas are the backbone of this chapter's assertion that faith-based organizations and concerned individuals can be integral in assisting newly released individuals to successfully reenter their communities and become productive members. This chapter concludes with a quote from Director Wilkinson about the importance of Social Justice in the correctional system. Although in this quote he does not mention faith-based organizations, the success of the returning citizens to their communities cannot be complete without them. Wilkinson writes:

In addition to social service and justice agencies, the community at large should maintain a high level of responsibility for a formerly incarcerated person's success. In other words, the business and corporate communities as well as trade unions should be intimately involved in this process. Career centers, secondary, postsecondary, and proprietary schools should also be more involved. Agencies responsible for housing should be at the table. Most prisoners have a multitude of medical challenges: substance abuse, health care, mental illness. Access to quality health care should not be optional; thus, health care organizations should commit resources. This all may seem obvious. I'm suggesting that the connectivity with these services should be extraordinary. If managed under a rubric of social justice, the rearrest, reconviction, and reincarceration levels for former prisoners should

³² Wilkinson, Bucholtz, and Siegfried, "Prison Reform Through Offender Reentry," 609.

be greatly diminished. In order to achieve a social justice approach, much of the work needs to take place while a person is imprisoned. For the most part, we live in a disposable culture. Persons who have been convicted of crimes should not be a part of this “throw-away” mentality. In my estimation, only when the various sectors of society can come together with admirable intentions will we be pleased with our progress. And when we can accomplish this, I believe correctional and justice agency leaders will freely take responsibility for recidivism rates. Therefore, we must leave room for a true sense of hope and rationality.³³

³³ Reginald A. Wilkinson, “Incarceration and Beyond: A Personal Perspective,” *Race/Ethnicity: Multidisciplinary Global Contexts* 2 no. 1 (2008): 137-150, muse.jhu.edu/article/252440.

CHAPTER SIX

PROJECT ANALYSIS

From the start of this journey, the idea has been that reentry of ex-offenders could be less challenging if members of the local congregation would be willing to participate in mentoring and shepherding them through the reentry process. As noted elsewhere in this work, one of the known facts within the criminal justice system is that at some point most people that are incarcerated today will at some point in the future be released back into society. Over 10,000 ex-prisoners are released from America's state and federal prisons every week and arrive on the doorsteps of our nation's communities, and studies show that approximately two-thirds will likely be rearrested within three years of release. For the communities to which most of them return, the release of ex-offenders is challenging. In my ministerial context, this means that of the roughly 200 people that are released to Muskingum County after incarceration, fifty will return to prison within three years. These figures do not fully describe the human toll that this creates in the community. Not only does the community have to deal with the fallout of the original offense that sent a person to prison, the violations of supervision orders or the rapid re-engagement of the ex-offender with crime and the criminal element causes double pain and frustration to families, law enforcement, the judicial system, parole and probation departments, and the larger community.

Early in the twenty-first century, corrections experts and politicians began to recognize the growing importance of faith-based and community organizations (FBCOs) being involved in the rehabilitation efforts of returning citizens. In the United States Department of Labor's Center for Faith Based Community Initiatives toolkit is written:

Local FBCO reentry programs can provide ex-prisoners with the compassion and services they need to thrive in the communities they are returning to. Placing ex-prisoners in steady employment that matches their abilities and needs is an important effort that helps ensure the safety of America's streets and the successful integration of ex-prisoners into America's communities. Recidivism is a vicious cycle of crime, prison, more crime, re-imprisonment, and so on. Statistics show that more than two-thirds of released prisoners will be charged with new crimes within three years following their release, and over half will be reincarcerated. According to criminal justice experts, an attachment to the labor force through stable employment, in concert with family and community connections, is a key element in helping ex-prisoners break this cycle.¹

This would require that willing congregants would be prepared for this work through training. To that end, this project evolved into an informational and biblical study whose aim was to first teach the importance of engaging with the returning citizen and discussion on how that would look within our context.

From the completed research in the beginning of this project, it was recognized that the county where the congregation is located did not have many resources to assist returning citizens in finding their way back to productive citizenship. Though it has been widely recognized that personal engagement with returning citizens is crucial to their successful reentry, most helping agencies focus on physical needs like food clothing shelter and employment but do not explore the emotional social, and spiritual needs of these people. The conventional wisdom has always been that the family should form that

¹ U.S. Department of Labor, "Ready4Reentry: Prisoner Reentry Toolkit for Faith-Based and Community Organizations," Center for Faith Based Community Initiatives, [usdol_readt4reentry_re_prisom_reentry_toolkit_for_faith_based_and_community_org.pdf](#).

strong foundation to meet those needs. However, many of the families and the environmental situations that offenders return to cannot meet these needs. This is the area where the local church community can step in.

From the research into the various chapters, it became apparent that the congregation that I serve has historically been actively involved in helping others. From raising money to help the poor to being a participant in the Underground Railroad, Union Baptist Church has made important contributions to the life and legacy of the city. As membership in the church declined, many of the programs that the church had were discontinued, but the desire to help remained intact. All that was needed was a catalyst to spark that action.

That catalyst occurred with a chance of observing two young men who displayed all the evidence of having just been released from prison, running across the street from where they were dropped off and heading into an uncertain future. Why uncertain? Because they had not been met by family or friends. They were not provided with new clothing by which they could shed the tell-tale signs of where they had come from. There was no one there to steer them to the resources and people that could help make their transition easier. That was the moment that the question came, “What is the church doing to help these returning citizens have a successful transition from prison, and jail back into the community?” and “Would this small congregation be willing to engage with the returning citizen and their families in a meaningful way? There is much statistical evidence that the involvement of the faith community is beneficial in the reentry process.

The first task in this endeavor was to find out what level of involvement the congregation had with returning citizens. This was important because it would guide

where I would start in the process. Those who had no personal experience or exposure to offenders or the criminal justice system would require more extensive training and would likely be less willing to become personally involved. Of those who would be willing to engage, what was unknown was the level of willingness of the members to engage the newly returned and what that engagement would look like. That brings up the second task, which is to determine the structure of the assistance or mentoring. Would it be one-on-one mentoring or would a group model work best? These were questions that I hoped to find answers to within the project.

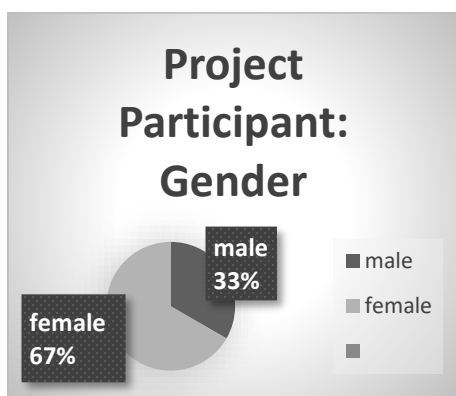


Figure 1. Project participant: gender

The participants in the study are all members of the Union Baptist Church, which is the current ministry context. It is an older group ranging in ages between early sixties to mid-seventies. All are life-long residents of Zanesville, and all have been members of the church for more than twenty years. The group had 33% male representation and 67% female representation. All hold leadership positions in the church, deacons, Sunday school teachers, trustee board members, financial, and recording secretaries, youth ministry, deaconesses, and outreach. As far as outreach ministry is concerned, most of the members mentioned engage in outreach in some form. Some write letters and cards to encourage the sick and shut in. Our deacons visit home-bound members once a month to

serve them communion. There is an ongoing project every year to provide toys for children of incarcerated parents through Project Angel Tree.

To collect the data for the project, the qualitative method was chosen. This methodology fits the structure for the research in that interviews, questionnaires and guided discussions would be used to gather the needed information. I chose this method because most of the information gathered was subjective. I was trying to gauge how people felt about engaging in an activity that most people shy away from. I was also looking to discover what, if any, interactions they had with the criminal justice system. That experience would tend to either make them more agreeable to the project's intention or cause them not to participate. This would also help determine whether or not this project could be expanded into an ongoing community mission.

Originally, the envisioned project would have involved the church community within the city of Zanesville. The idea was to bring leaders together from the various churches and introduce the project to them with members of the reentry community providing training and advice. However, two issues arose that changed the scope of the project. First, it became apparent that the focus of the project needed to be narrowed down from the larger church community to the local congregation, which I serve as pastor. After all, if any meaningful ministry would be developed it would begin at this level, and it would be more manageable to gather the needed data. There would be ample opportunity to expand the project to include other churches in the future.

The other issue was the COVID-19 pandemic. This severely curtailed any plans for large gatherings in the community. This had a negative effect on the original timetable of the project due to the restrictions that were in place. During this time many

churches including mine became more active on social media. Worship services and classes were conducted online. Many churches expanded their use of electronic media to stay in touch with their congregations. Although the use of technology increased the possibility of completion of the project, the rather slow learning curve of the investigator in that area prevented rapid progress. Also, many of the participants in the congregation did not have adequate access to the social media applications which would have made online gatherings possible. These issues, along with a medical issue which necessitated a delay in the implementation of the project, brought us to the final form. The project consisted of four guided discussions or classes, both pre- and post-surveys, and individual interviews with the participants.

The classes, done over a four-week period, covered four main topics. The first class was designed to inform the students of the reentry situation in Muskingum County. The basic structure of the project, the main idea for the research, and the pre-test were given at this stage. Also, the release form for the participants was given. This detailed that the information gathered in discussions and interviews would be treated as confidential and that any information used in the final document would not contain any personal identifiers. I informed the class that I would record all sessions, that the recordings were for my personal benefit and would be disposed of at the end of the project.

The second class was an overview of the biblical basis for the project using the foundational text from Matthew 25:31-46. At the center of this pericope is the idea of the believer and the believing community alongside those who are hurting, sick or in prison and meeting needs. The lesson focused on the opportunity that the Christian community

has to effect positive changes in the lives of ex-offenders and their families. The concept of “Tikkun Olam” was discussed. This concept taken from Judaism is translated, “fixing the world.” It is the idea that God purposefully left things undone or in an unfinished state so that human beings could become partners with God in completing creation. This includes helping people through their difficulties. As a partner with God in creation, we are God’s agent to bring light to dark places. In the ancient world, this meant helping to alleviate suffering, and to make people whole. Here in the twenty-first century this concept is manifested mainly in the giving of money to charitable causes or donating food or clothing to area help centers.

Tikkun Olam embodies the spirit of philanthropy. Increasing the well-being of humankind is one of the key elements of repairing the world. Helping those who are in need, no matter in what capacity, is crucial and "holy" work. Tikkun Olam, as it relates to practical methods, applies to working in all communities, not just Jewish communities. Jews are members of greater society, and as such, their actions are not limited to their own communities. Social welfare and volunteer work, as well as the donation of monetary and physical resources, are ways in which people can be philanthropically involved, and at the same time, be involved in Tikkun Olam.²

The desired end for the introduction of the concept of Tikkun Olam within this project is to spur community action of a more personal kind.

The third class dealt with the biblical exposition of Paul’s letter to Philemon where the apostle advocates for his mentee upon the latter’s release from prison, and subsequent return to the community he fled from. The great apostle took up the cause of Onesimus, a former prisoner along with Paul and former slave of Philemon. Paul’s plea was for Philemon to restore fellowship to the former inmate. He asked that Onesimus be received as a brother, that he be forgiven for any wrongdoing, and accepted into the

² Jennifer Noparstak, “Tikkun Olam,” Learning to Give, <https://www.learningtogive.org/resources/tikkun-olam>.

community. This is the idea of reentry. The fourth class was a review of what was discussed during the last sessions, a discussion about the need for the church to engage the returning citizen and the administration of the post-survey. The last two weeks of the project was devoted to conducting personal interviews with the participants.



Figure 2. Contact with ex-offenders

As mentioned above, the first session involved the students taking the pre-test. The pre-test consisted of nineteen questions. The first five questions were simple yes and no questions with follow-up questions to support the answers. The rest of the questions were essay questions to determine the level of involvement with the criminal justice system each participant had experience with, and how often the congregation had encountered or ministered to individuals who had contact with the criminal justice system, whether they were the individuals or their families.

The results of the pre-survey were very interesting. First, the percentage of the group that had any contact with ex-offenders was 67%. Members who had contact with families that were experiencing the return of an ex-offender was 58%. Members who had actively ministered to ex-offenders or families of ex-offenders was 58%. These were larger percentage points than were expected. This meant that most of the participants had a family member who had been involved in the criminal justice system or they had been

involved themselves. Also, the members of the congregation had ministered to families of incarcerated people or ex-offenders. As we engaged in the personal interviews it would become apparent that most of the ex-offenders were a part of the members' families. Other interesting statistics emerged. 16% of participants had actively sought out offenders or ex-offenders to minister to.

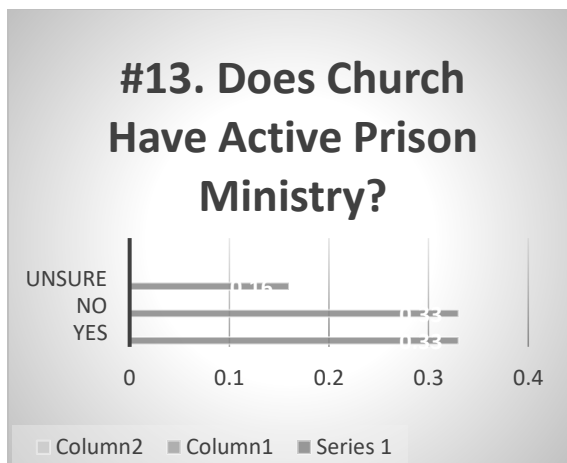


Figure 3. #13 Does church have active prison ministry?

Question #13 asked if the congregation has an active prison ministry. 33% said yes, 16% said no, and 33% were unsure. This data suggests that the Project Angel-Tree mission that we participate in is not seen by most members as ministering to inmates and their families. Questions #18 and #19 were designed to gauge the participants own involvement with the criminal justice system. The results were that almost half of the participants had family members that have either been accused or convicted of a criminal offense, and that almost half of the participants or their family members had served time in juvenile detention, jail, or prison.

The remainder of the pre-survey was in the form of essay questions that gauged the level of experience the congregation had in ministering to ex-offenders and to determine whether they would be willing to consider a mentoring role in the lives of

those who are returning home. Many of the participants had family or friends that had been involved in the criminal justice system. For some, the experience was difficult because they were dealing with repeat offenders, younger people, and those who, the respondents said, were not being serious about their rehabilitation or were continuing to be involved with negative people that influenced negative behavior.

One respondent described the experience of dealing with someone returning from incarceration as “expensive.” They were referring to the increased need for food, clothing, transportation, and continuing legal fees as they navigated their loved one’s release from prison and getting settled back in the community. One of the difficulties in this situation is employment. In fact, a few of the respondents said that employment was a challenge for the returning citizens they had encountered. It was surprising to learn that within such a small, close-knit congregation that many did not know that other members were dealing with the challenges of having a person in their families dealing with the criminal justice system. Almost half of the members did not know of anyone in the congregation that was dealing with someone involved in the system. Of those, half were personally dealing with a family member that was either a returning citizen or was currently actively involved with the system.

What was not surprising was that most of the members had little to no understanding of the concept of reentry. When asked, “Briefly describe your understanding of prisoner reentry.” 33% of the respondents did not know or were unsure of what reentry was, 25% had a basic understanding (getting out, having employment, having a support system). The rest of the responses did not answer the question, which may have been due to the wording of the question rather than the understanding of the

respondents. When the members turned in their pre-survey, we started the group discussion with an overview of the reentry process. The handout used is included on the following page.

Reentry Fact Sheet

- Each year, more than 700,000 individuals are released from state and federal prisons.¹
- At least 95 percent of all inmates in America will ultimately be released and returned to the community.²
- Another 9 to 10 million more people cycle through local jails annually.³ • Roughly 40% of former federal prisoners and more than 60% of former state prisoners are rearrested within three years of release.⁴
- The costs of imprisonment and jail in the past 20 years have grown at a faster rate than nearly any other state budget item.⁵
- It costs an average of \$78.95 per day to keep an inmate locked up.⁶
- The U.S. now spends more than \$68 billion annually on federal, state, and local corrections.⁷
- High rates of recidivism (the act of reengaging in criminal behavior that results in being rearrested, reconvicted, or returned to custody within three years of release from prison or probation) means more crime, more victims, and more pressure on an already overburdened criminal justice system.⁸
- Studies indicate that high quality jobs diminish the likelihood of recidivism.⁹
- Research suggests that ex-offenders who maintain a steady job and have close ties with family are less likely to renew their involvement in criminal behavior.¹⁰

- Most ex-offenders lack a competitive resume, employment credentials, are under skilled relative to the general population of jobseekers, have the added stigma of an arrest or prison record, and by virtue of their record, face an especially narrow range of job opportunities; which are all considerable barriers to employment.^{11 12}
- Studies have found that employers were unwilling to hire ex-offenders even when they exceeded the qualifications for the position. Nearly 60% of employers surveyed in 4 large U.S. cities reported that they would “definitely not” or “probably not” hire an ex-prisoner.¹³
- By reducing the rate of offenders who return to prison, we keep communities safer, families more intact, and can therefore, begin to reinvest incarceration dollars into other critical areas.¹⁴
- Those of us with social capital have the ability to influence individuals who have the authority to hire an applicant, despite their criminal record, based on inside knowledge about the applicant’s character that may be gleaned from a third-party source.¹⁵
- Successful reintegration into the workforce translates into: a) safer neighborhoods, b) stable families, c) prosocial structured activity for an ex-offender, d) reduced taxpayer costs for reincarceration, e) living wages for an ex-offender to support himself/herself and family, and f) income for restitution to victims, court and correctional supervision fees, continued mental or behavioral health treatment, and child support, when necessary.¹⁻¹⁶

Factsheet Bibliography

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As this information was introduced, I pointed out that the handout referred mostly to the employment situation for returning citizens. This is only part of the reentry puzzle. The other part is developing and maintaining positive, helping relationships within the

³ U.S. Department of Justice, "Reentry Fact Sheet," Reentry Talking Points, <http://www.justice.gov>.

community to assist whenever difficulties arise. That is the place where the church's reentry efforts can shine.

After the classes, the post-survey was given. This survey consisted of eight questions that were follow-ups to both the pre-survey and the classes. The results were that everyone in the group felt that they had a better understanding of prisoner reentry. One participant said that they did not know what inmate went through as they transitioned from prison to community. The person indicated that they had gained new insight into the barriers many faced upon their release. It made them more empathetic and more willing to find a way to assist. They all saw the need for the church to get involved in the reentry process with returning individuals, and that this involvement was part of the church's mission to build the kingdom of God. For the most part, the participants indicated that they were willing to explore getting involved with the reentry community in Muskingum County.

On the survey, two people actually answered in the negative about joining the reentry community. However, the totality of the answers suggested that the participants merely read the question wrong, or the question was not posited correctly. In any case that percentage for positive interaction with returning citizens was almost 100%. There were two respondents that indicated that they were either not sure of engaging in the reentry process or that they were not willing at all. This was surprising in that the respondents (a married couple) were involved with our toy exchange with children of incarcerated parents. Later, during the individual interviews they were asked about this apparent contradiction. We will see the reasons for their answers when we examine those interviews.

By far, the most interesting part of the project was the individual interviews. It was during these interviews that I found out that many of the participants had real-life experiences with a loved one either going through the criminal justice system or helping the newly released.

One of the participants self-describes as a recovering substance abuser. This individual related that it was the family connection that was present that helped in their recovery. Loving confrontation that occurred when the person found themselves slipping, helped to straighten them out. Intervention to the point of making sure the individual entered rehab and stuck with it finally help the person overcome their addictions. This individual identifies with those who are returning home from prison from the perspective that they are struggling with self-worth. The ability to love and forgive themselves is critical to successful reentry, according to this individual. The church and specifically individual church mentors can help the returning citizens see themselves as a valuable member of a community.

One of the participants had been active in visiting prisons in the area as part of a national service and civil rights organization. This individual would assist with the set up and oversight of chapters that were formed inside the prisons. His experience with incarcerated people helped him to understand the struggles that many have when they are released. His belief is that mentoring programs would lead the participants toward a deeper relationship with God. This emphasis on the religious aspect of the mentoring program was repeated by several participants. It is important to note that the primary focus of the project is successful reentry back into the community, not necessarily religious conversion. Although religious conversion would be an acceptable outcome, it

would not be the only reason for the church's involvement in this process. Our main focus would be as a community resource and guide.

One of the participants explained their willingness to shepherd returning citizens in purely religious terms. This interviewee stated that it was important to point the newly released "to the Lord" to have a successful outcome. The interviewee related their own experience with a family member who had been involved with the criminal justice system. The person described raising the individual "in the right way" but having to deal with their negative behavior and choices. The person ended the conversation with the statement that as Christians we cannot give up on individuals and that we must continue to pray and reach out to them. It was pointed out that the primary purpose for this project would be the successful reintegration of an ex-offender back into the community, and not their religious conversion. Obviously, as a church community religious conversion would be an acceptable secondary result from this project but not the primary goal.

Another participant is the mother of a returning citizen. She gave an interesting perspective in the struggles that the family endures with the homecoming of a newly released person. She indicated that there was a significant financial strain placed on the family as the person transitioned from prison to home. This situation continues at the present because of the difficulty that the returning citizen has had in securing adequate employment. She indicated that many of the helping agencies in the area were not adequately equipped, or willing to assist in the transition beyond meeting basic needs such as food, or clothing. She indicated that she would be willing to participate with a group assisting with reentry as long as the assistance was meaningful, and practical.

Most of the rest of the participants expressed the same responses. They all felt that the church should be involved in reentry activities, they all agreed that if given the opportunity, they would participate in more extensive reentry training, and they all indicated that they would be willing to be involved in some group activity that benefits the newly released. All of the participants indicated that their perception of the returning citizen's struggle to rebuild their lives had changed. Even the ones who had dealt with people coming home felt that they had gained more insight into that issue than before this project. All of the participants felt that they would be comfortable and more effective if the mentoring process was done as part of a group effort.

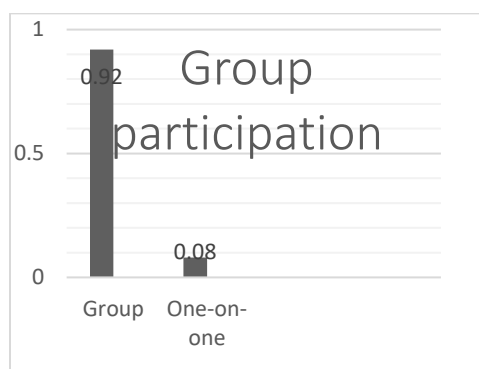


Figure 4. Group participation

As mentioned before, there were two participants who indicated on the post-survey that they would either not be interested in mentoring or had concerns about it. The participants are a married couple who have had extensive contact with returning citizens and their families. When asked about the seeming contradictions in their responses, the controversy was cleared up. The husband's negative answer was to the question of whether he would be interested in participating in group activities with returning citizens. His explanation for this answer was that he preferred to interact one-on-one with returning citizens, which made him the lone participant willing to mentor individually with a returning citizen. His wife, on the other hand, had answered the same question

with a “not sure” response. In the interview, she indicated that her reluctance was not because of the interaction with returning citizens but due to her perceived lack of Bible knowledge, but she was more willing to participate in group activities. Both agreed that the main thing that they saw as a need for people involved in reentry was forgiveness. In other words, the formerly incarcerated needed to know that they are forgiven, both by God and the community. The community needs to be this model of forgiveness so that the returning member can be successfully reassimilated.

A bonus interview happened when I got an opportunity to have a conversation with a person who recently returned home from incarceration. This person is a member of the church and the adult child of one of the participants. This person gave a perspective on reentry that was unexpected because of the respondent’s transparency concerning the struggles encountered as they transitioned back into the community. One of the transparent things revealed was the level of paranoia that many returning citizens feel. The explanation was interesting. According to the person, many inmates develop a high level of distrust while incarcerated. They are wary of being manipulated by other inmates, and by staff members. As a result, when they are released, they are mistrustful of any promises or assurances that they get from mostly well-meaning people. When asked what most returning citizens need, the response was official ID’s, a way to earn money, and a real place to live. The respondent explained that most individuals that are released from prison, give an address, but do not stay there for long. They just give the address because they must, but many of them are not welcomed for a long period of time, even when the person who lives there gives their assent that the person can come to that address.

When asked what specifically the church could do to help, the reply was to believe in the person, even when they mess up. The respondent explained that once an individual enters prison most of their support system vanishes. Even the ones who emphatically declare that they will be in their corner eventually cease their support. This causes the inmate to distrust everyone who comes with a smile, a handshake, and a promise to help them when they get out. Many times, the conditions that are imposed to get that help are so restrictive, that it is impossible to get meaningful assistance. The respondent did acknowledge that the returning citizen must be an active participant in reentry, but the process becomes more difficult when the agencies and individuals that promise to help either do not come through with the help or throw up barriers to impede rather than to empower.

The respondent revealed that if it had not been for supportive family members and understanding members of the church who showed support during incarceration, it would have been more difficult for them to readjust to life outside of prison. The respondent emphatically stated that the local church community is a major network and resource that the returning citizen can lean on for support and direction when they are released. A quick internet search of helping resources in Muskingum County reveals that there are many service programs to meet the needs of those who are struggling with homelessness, substance abuse, financial difficulties, and mental health issues.⁴ As important as these agencies are, there are few that specialize in the successful reconnection of returning citizens back into the community. The Restored Citizens Network, an agency mentioned

⁴ Muskingum Valley Educational Service Center, "Muskingum County Community Resource Guide," Muskingum Valley Educational Service Center, https://www.mvesc.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/Muskingum-County-Resource-Guide_01_12_22.pdf.

earlier in this work, seeks to help those returning from incarceration to the Muskingum County area. This is accomplished through a referral process connecting community social service agencies with those incarcerated or recently released. This process, which should happen while the individual is incarcerated does not always occur. This may be because few people in the corrections community that are tasked with reentry processes feel that they are very effective. The formerly incarcerated individual that was interviewed had a very negative opinion about these organizations. “They are in it for themselves” was the comment. It was interesting to note that in the list of links and affiliated resources, not one church is mentioned. This situation is probably why the prevailing thought is that the reentry community is doing nothing for the actual reassimilation of returning citizens. In many cases, when established agencies are not available when needed, people in need are advised to contact the area churches for assistance. Rather than taking an adversarial role against these organizations, I believe that the church must seek out collaborations with the reentry community in order to bring about sustainable change.

From the very beginning of this journey, I have been convinced that for all its programs and all the agencies that exist to help returning citizens find their way back in the community, the criminal justice system lacks the one component that leads to greater reentry success, and that is human-to-human contact and the compassion that gives time and assistance to those who return home from prison. At the same time, I have been more convinced that the one institution that can have a positive effect on offender reentry is the local church. My hypothesis stated that “if the local church becomes involved with the reentry efforts of the newly released persons, we can help shepherd them toward a

prosocial lifestyle and give them alternatives to the criminal thoughts and behaviors that caused them to be placed in the criminal justice system.”

In actuality, this study endeavored to gauge the willingness of church members to be trained in the mentoring process. The revised hypothesis should read, If our church leadership would be willing to be trained in mentoring ex-offenders, then they would be equipped to help guide them toward successful reintegration. The change reflects the idea that the focus of the project would be the attitudes of the local congregation that would drive positive action. With the revised hypothesis, the plan was to engage the congregation of my context to determine their level of willingness to engage with returning citizens. What was revealed was that 92% of the congregation were willing to engage with returning citizens and their families as part of a group; 8% preferred one-on-one interactions. The 8% that preferred one-on-one interaction indicated that their comfort level with mentoring returning citizens was better when they could meet with one person at a time and help them.

Most of the participants learned that the pathway to reentry is not easy. Starting within the institution or jail, inmates may or may not get access to programming and services to help them transition to the outside world. We discussed the reality that, within Ohio the overcrowded conditions that were recently experienced, programming was reserved for the ones most closely scheduled to be released, and that their success often depended on if they had the time left on their sentences to finish programming. While most of the participants felt that housing and employment were important components of success after release, many of them did not realize that their environment and associations had a large impact on whether or not they are successful in their reentry

efforts. Many of these individuals have been abandoned or forgotten by their families and friends. One former inmate related that most returning citizens, when giving an address for where they will be staying after release, use residences of those who will only allow them to stay for a short period of time, or have allowed them the use of the address without any intention of letting them stay there. Basically, the address is used as a point of contact, a place where mail is delivered, and phone messages can be retrieved. Research by the Urban Institute backs up this information. According to the institute's study, "Understanding the Challenges of Prisoner Reentry: Research Findings from the Urban Institute's Prisoner Reentry Portfolio:"

Overall, one-third of Illinois Returning Home respondents returned home to temporary living arrangements.⁵ About one in five reported living at more than one address after being in the community for one to three months, and by six to eight months after release, 31 percent had lived at more than one address.⁵

The research confirms that the need for mentoring goes beyond just picking a person up for Sunday school and church service. Although many of their needs the local congregation may not be able to meet on their own, we may be able to act as a "clearinghouse" of resource and referral to the agencies that can help.

With the correction in the hypothesis, I found that it was generally proven that our congregation, if given the appropriate training and setting, would be willing to mentor and shepherd returning citizens in their reentry efforts. As I have stated elsewhere in this project, this willingness to help and mentor has been built into the DNA of this congregation for over 180 years, there just needs to be guidance and a structured program

⁵ Demelza Baer et al., "Understanding the Challenges of Prisoner Reentry: Research Findings from the Urban Institute's Prisoner Reentry Portfolio," The Urban Institute Justice Policy Center, January 2006, <https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/42981/411289-Understanding-the-Challenges-of-Prisoner-Reentry.PDF>.

to accomplish this ministry to the formerly incarcerated. I personally learned that the issues that surround the subject of prisoner reentry are not isolated to “those folk over there,” meaning people who do not touch or have not been touched by our lives and ministries. These issues are affecting many of the people who serve in my ministerial context. They are our neighbors, friends, and fellow laborers.

Originally, this work evolved from the idea that the faith-based community and more specifically the local church was the best place that newly released citizens could go to receive help in their transition back into the community. After all, most churches are located in the communities that they serve, are familiar with available resources, and have relationships with businesses and other leaders and can act as a sort of clearinghouse to make these resources available to those who need them. Also, the idea was that the members of the local congregation could serve as role models and mentors to help guide the recently released individual toward a prosocial lifestyle.

The one thing that needed to be discovered was the level of willingness of the local church to engage with this group of people and their families. Initially, the idea was to gather leaders from several diverse churches in the area to present this project and survey the willingness to mentor ex-offenders. Two things became apparent with this approach. First, the number of participants would have been larger than I could have competently handled given the timeframe that I had and the disrupting presence of the COVID-19 virus. The second thing was that the focus of the project ended up where it should have been all the time, that is with the lay people within the congregation. After all, it would be the non-clergy church community that would be doing the bulk of the work. This fact turned out to be beneficial for the project by bringing it home to where

the “rubber meets the road.” The possibility still exists that in the near future this project will be expanded within the larger, more diverse church community to include several congregations and volunteers.

One of the first things that became apparent as I initiated the project was how little recent data is available. Most of the research available for a project like this is over twenty years old. This dates back to the George W. Bush’s administration where the importance of faith-based entities and community organizations coming together to provide services that negatively impacted communities was made a policy issue. Then, the federal government made funding available to these groups to meet the needs of returning citizens. Helping partnerships sprung up throughout the country, in many areas where poor and marginalized people struggled to maintain a semblance of stability while dealing with street violence, drugs, poverty and incarceration.

Today, many of these programs have ceased to exist, or have changed the focus of their mission. Some transitioned to meet the demand for services brought on by the global pandemic. Other programs were temporary to begin with and when funding ended, so did the program. The issue of successful reentry back into these neighborhoods is still present. It is certainly a very important issue where the congregation that I serve is located. It is an important issue wherever there are people returning from jail or prison back into the environments that they left. There is research that suggests that the involvement of local churches and faith-based organizations has a beneficial effect on the reentry efforts of newly released citizens. Solomon et al writes:

Some studies have examined how individual religious involvement can reduce the likelihood that the individual will engage in crime. Research has concentrated on the role of religious involvement in preventing crime among African American youth. One study shows a clear negative relationship between church involvement

and serious crime perpetrated by young people. In particular, the influence of the church seems to serve as a buffer on the effect of neighborhood disorder, which is thought to be one of the conditions that enable crime to flourish... Faith-based institutions offer a wealth of resources and services for the communities in which they reside. Many of these organizations have been involved in the work of helping individuals and families cope with the effects of incarceration and return either formally or informally for many years. Importantly, some of the most active and influential faith-based institutions are located in communities hardest hit by this cycle of imprisonment and return. Where traditional public and nonprofit programs may not be able to reach the most at-risk former prisoners in poor communities, well-established churches and other faith-based institutions may be able to fill this void with needed social, educational, and employment services.⁶

Except for a few examples (Prison Fellowship International being one), many of the community-based, faith-based reentry programs have morphed into job training, and resource sharing entities. While these programs are good and necessary for the returning citizen, the component of mentoring and shepherding has all but disappeared. In the conversation I had with a returning citizen, it was told to me that if a person has someone to believe in them, it makes all the difference. It reminds me of the story of another individual that was released from prison after doing time for murder. This individual had a network of family and church that never gave up on him. In the end, even after his mother passed away, it was the support and advocacy of the church that led to his eventual release. It has been several years since his release, and he continues to build on the foundation that the church helped lay for his reintegration back into the community. Mentoring makes a difference.

Moving forward, this project has taught me that the work of assisting ex-offenders in their reentry process through the church is extremely important. The issue is that there is very little contemporary data that explores the social/spiritual aspect of the local

⁶ U.S. Department of Labor, "Ready4Reentry," [usdol_readt4reentry_re_prisom_reentry_toolkit_for_faith_based_and_community_org.pdf](#).

congregation's involvement with those returning from prison. The Urban Institutes Study entitled *Outside The Walls* did have some data from about twenty years ago that was instructive. The report said:

With a new national focus on faith-based initiatives, it is important to develop a better understanding of the role the faith community can play in assisting reentry. In lieu of specific findings on reentry and faith organizations, lessons can be drawn from efforts in other areas. In 1998, Public/Private Ventures, a Philadelphia-based national nonprofit organization committed to improving social policies, programs, and community initiatives, launched a demonstration and research project to partner faith-based organizations with nonreligious public and private agencies to address the needs of at-risk juveniles. Lessons from the 10 sites selected to participate in the demonstration program may offer guidance for faith-based organizations interested in assisting in the reentry process. Early findings from the demonstration sites suggest that there is no simple model for building effective faith-based programs for high-risk juveniles (Ericson 2001). Researchers point to three distinct steps that seem to form the foundation of successful programs: (1) building relationships with the clients or target population; (2) drawing them into available programs and services; and (3) connecting them to appropriate services. They also found that faith-based institutions are generally open to developing partnerships with other groups.⁷

Although the research in this instance was with juvenile offenders, the three points that they identified as distinct steps to a successful program were echoed in the project that was completed this year.

The first point of building relationships with our target clients may be better accomplished while people are still incarcerated. This would necessitate that congregations or representatives of local congregations would have to be willing to go into prisons or jails to begin that relationship-building work. Kairos, a Christian based reentry program that operates in Ohio is a good example of this type of activity. Since my group indicated that they would be more willing to engage offenders as part of a group, this might be a viable choice. The only issue with this approach is that there would be no

⁷ Amy L. Solomon et al., *Outside the Walls: A National Snapshot of Community-Based Prisoner Reentry Programs* (Washington, DC: Urban Institute, 2004), 164.

choice in the region that the inmate participants intend to return upon release. This would make it difficult for outside follow-up if the inmate were to be released to a county which is too far for the local congregation to be of any real help. We would have to find a way to target those who will be returning to Muskingum County. Working with the parole or probation departments within the county are an option that would enable us to reach that specific population.

The second point, drawing them into available services and programs, would be difficult within the research context. Muskingum County has few resources to help returning citizens. Although the job situation is improving, most of those positions are in the restaurant and service industries, and most of them have issues hiring ex-offenders. Advocacy in this area would be helpful but may be beyond the capabilities and the level of involvement of church volunteers. The same situation would occur with the third point, connecting clients with available services. From the work done with the local congregation, the only way these connections would happen would be if the providers of these services were part of the group process that the members would be comfortable with.

The findings of this research suggest that members of the local congregation would be of great assistance in the area of post-incarceration socialization. The anecdotal evidence that was collected suggests that many incarcerated people come from environments where there is a great deal of negative socialization. These persons learn to trust only a few close family and associates. In many cases they have indicated that they have no friends no matter how close their associations are. They are constantly on the lookout for potential victims or enemies, they do not trust law enforcement, courts, or

probation/parole personnel. Many do not trust faith-based organizations, because they feel that these organizations are somehow profiting from their efforts and feel that members of churches would be judgmental and suspicious of any attempt to change.

The church could become the non-threatening, non-judgmental place where any ex-offender could feel welcome. Here, the members would be able to begin the process of prosocial, positive socialization. Newly released individuals would be able to take the first steps in building a law-abiding lifestyle. Also important is that the church could help individuals develop important skills that would help with interpersonal relationships. This would not only translate into successful interactions in the job market, but it would also help with personal relationships and families as well. Though most of the formal research deals very little with positive socialization and the role of faith-based institutions, it is an area that would reap great rewards for the community, the newly released individual, and their families. It is an area of research that would be very fruitful.

APPENDIX A
SURVEY QUESTIONS

Pre-Survey Questions

1. Have you had any contact with ex-offenders? Yes/No (circle one)
2. If yes, briefly describe the experience.
3. Have you encountered any families experiencing the return of ex-offenders? Yes/No
4. If yes, briefly describe that experience.
5. Have you or your church ministered to individuals who were going through incarceration? Yes/No
6. Have you or your church ministered to a family or families of incarcerated people
7. How often would you say you have encountered ex-offenders and/or their families?
8. Do you know of anyone within your congregation that is dealing with an incarcerated loved one?
9. Are there any families within your congregations that are expecting the return of an individual from incarceration?
10. Have you or your congregation actively sought out ex-offenders or their families to minister to on an ongoing basis? (more than one time per year)
11. Briefly describe your understanding of prisoner reentry.
12. Briefly describe your understanding of the concept of mentoring.
13. Does your congregation have an active prison/jail ministry?
14. If the answer to the previous question is yes, how often does your prison/jail ministry group meet with newly released offenders?
15. Have you or your congregation participated in prison or jail ministry in the past?
16. How likely would you be to welcome ex-offenders and their families into your congregation?
17. Are there any crimes that ex-offenders have been convicted of that would lead you to NOT welcome them or their families into your congregations?
18. Have you or anyone in your family been involved in the criminal justice system as an accused or convicted offender?
19. Have you or anyone in your family served time in juvenile detention, jail, or prison?

Post-Survey Questions

1. Do you have a better understanding of prisoner reentry? Yes No
2. In the light of Matthew 25:31-46, do you see the need for the local congregation to get involved with reentry? Yes No

On a scale of i-5, 1 being totally unwilling, and 5 being totally willing, how willing are you to engage with offenders returning to the Zanesville/ Muskingum County area? Circle one. 1 2 3 4 5
3. Do you think the local church should have an active prison ministry? Yes No
4. Do you think the local church should partner with a local reentry program? Yes

No
5. Would you be open to speaking with area reentry experts about meeting needs?

Yes No
6. Should reentry efforts also include the ex-offenders' families? Yes No
7. Would you be willing to learn how to minister to ex-offenders' families? Yes

No

Thank you for participating in this project!

APPENDIX B
REENTRY FACT SHEET

Reentry Fact Sheet

- Each year, more than 700,000 individuals are released from state and federal prisons.
- At least 95 percent of all inmates in America will ultimately be released and returned to the community.
- Another 9 to 10 million more people cycle through local jails annually.
- Roughly 40% of former federal prisoners and more than 60% of former state prisoners are rearrested within three years of release.⁴
- The costs of imprisonment and jail in the past 20 years have grown at a faster rate than nearly any other state budget item.
- It costs an average of \$78.95 per day to keep an inmate locked up.
- The U.S. now spends more than \$68 billion annually on federal, state, and local corrections.
- High rates of recidivism (the act of reengaging in criminal behavior that results in being rearrested, reconvicted, or returned to custody within three years of release from prison or probation) means more crime, more victims, and more pressure on an already overburdened criminal justice system.
- Studies indicate that high quality jobs diminish the likelihood of recidivism.
- Research suggests that ex-offenders who maintain a steady job and have close ties with family are less likely to renew their involvement in criminal behavior.¹
- Most ex-offenders lack a competitive resume, employment credentials, are under skilled relative to the general population of jobseekers, have the added stigma of an arrest or prison record, and by virtue of their record, face an especially narrow range of job opportunities, which are all considerable barriers to employment.
- Studies have found that employers were unwilling to hire ex-offenders even when they exceeded the qualifications for the position. Nearly 60% of employers surveyed in 4 large U.S. cities reported that they would “definitely not” or “probably not” hire an ex-prisoner.
- By reducing the rate of offenders who return to prison, we keep communities safer, families more intact, and can therefore, begin to reinvest incarceration dollars into other critical areas.
- Those of us with social capital have the ability to influence individuals who have the authority to hire an applicant, despite their criminal record, based on inside knowledge about the applicant’s character that may be gleaned from a third-party source.
- Successful reintegration into the workforce translates into a) safer neighborhoods, b) stable families, c) prosocial structured activity for an ex-offender, d) reduced taxpayer costs for reincarceration, e) living wages for an ex-offender to support himself/herself and family, and f) income for restitution to victims, court and correctional supervision

fees, continued mental or behavioral health treatment, and child support, when necessary.¹

¹ U.S. Department of Justice, “Reentry Fact Sheet,” Reentry Talking Points, <http://www.justice.gov>.

APPENDIX C
BIBLE STUDIES

Bible Study Part 1

Introduction

This is the first of 4 Bible studies that we will embark on concerning the local church ministering to ex-offenders. The scriptural basis for these studies will be Matthew 25:31-46.

Matthew 25:31-46

- 31** “When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory.
- 32** All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides *his* sheep from the goats.
- 33** And He will set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left.
- 34** Then the King will say to those on His right hand, ‘Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world:
- 35** for I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in;
- 36** I *was* naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me.’
- 37** “Then the righteous will answer Him, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed *You*, or thirsty and give *You* drink?
- 38** When did we see You a stranger and take *You* in, or naked and clothe *You*?
- 39** Or when did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?’

- 40** And the King will answer and say to them, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did *it* to one of the least of these My brethren, you did *it* to Me.’
- 41** “Then He will also say to those on the left hand, ‘Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels:
- 42** for I was hungry and you gave Me no food; I was thirsty and you gave Me no drink;
- 43** I was a stranger and you did not take Me in, naked and you did not clothe Me, sick and in prison and you did not visit Me.’
- 44** “Then they also will answer Him, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see You hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to You?’
- 45** Then He will answer them, saying, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did not do *it* to one of the least of these, you did not do *it* to Me.’
- 46** And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life” (Mt. 25:31–46).

Verses 31-40 hold a special significance as regards this lesson series. It shows how the righteous who are granted entrance into the Kingdom of God demonstrated their righteousness by feeding the hungry and thirsty, showing hospitality to strangers, clothing the naked and visiting the sick and those in prison. The aim of this project is to show that the local church should be involved in this kind of Kingdom work.

This project is designed to gauge the willingness of church leaders and members to engage with mentor and shepherd those who are returning home from incarceration, and to help guide them to make positive pro-social choices

I. Taking the Pre-Project Survey

- Take your time and answer every question
- There is no right or wrong answer
- Names are optional

II. Passing out The Reentry Fact Sheet

III. Questions

Bible Study Part 2

Matthew 25:31-46

Ministering to the “Least of These”

“When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory. 32 All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats.

33 And He will set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left. 34 Then the King will say to those on His right hand, ‘Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: 35 for I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; 36 I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me.’

37 “Then the righteous will answer Him, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed You, or thirsty and give You drink? 38 When did we see You a stranger and take You in, or naked and clothe You? 39 Or when did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?’ 40 And the King will answer and say to them, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me.’

41 “Then He will also say to those on the left hand, ‘Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels: 42 for I was hungry and you gave Me no food; I was thirsty and you gave Me no drink; 43 I was a stranger and you did not take Me in, naked and you did not clothe Me, sick and in prison and you did not visit Me.’

44 “Then they also will answer Him, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see You hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to You?’

45 Then He will answer them, saying, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me.’

46 And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life,” (Mt 25:31–46).

Bible Study Outline

Warnings and Woes Matt 23

- A Glimpse at the Time of Troubles Matt 24
- The Coming King and the Separations: Unfaithful Servant Matt 24:45-51; 5 Foolish Virgins; Unprofitable Servant. Matt 25:1-30

The King and the Kingdom Matt. 25:31-46

- Coming with his Angels
- Gathering of Nations
- Separation of sheep and goats
 - Criteria for separation
 - Deeds of the sheep
 - Seeing about the prisoner
 - Food, clothing, caring concern
 - Ancient Prisons did not have systems for care

- Many prisons required that prisoners pay for necessities
 - Christians made the effort to minister to “the least of these”
- Reward for the Righteous
- Concept of “Tikkun Olam”
- There is a particular concept that our Jewish brothers and sisters use to describe how they are called to respond to a world that feels like it’s coming apart at the seams. It is a process that calls all humanity into action. *Tikkun Olam*, in the simplest of terms, means “to repair the world.” When the fabric of society is torn, *Tikkun Olam* not only calls each of us to participate in mending what is broken, but to make it better than it was before it was damaged. And when it comes to the art of repairing the world, there are no shortcuts, no easy answers. It is the difficult and time-consuming work of repairing by way of reconciliation and restoration. To repair systems and structures, we usually need to break them down to basic levels, see where the problem is, address the root causes of failure, and then begin rebuilding. It is not hard to look around this world, our own communities, perhaps even our own families, and see a thousand different fissures – cracks where God’s harmonious creation has somehow gone awry. *Tikkun Olam* is not about grand gestures, but rather small acts of kindness, small steps made in faith, small displays of love and solidarity. Each daily action that embodies lovingkindness

does not necessarily make an immediate, large impact. But as we keep loving and walking in grace, our collective actions, all together, can add up. They can begin to make a new world—a whole new creation! —if we only have eyes to see it.¹

¹ Todd Pick and Jennifer Pick, “With All Your Heart Worship Series: Coming Together,” Discipleship Ministries, The United Methodist Church, <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/worship/lent-2019-worship-planning-series/march-31-fourth-sunday-in-lent-year-c/fourth-sunday-in-lent-2019-year-c-preaching-notes>.

Bible Study Part 3**Philemon 1-25**

Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and Timothy *our* brother,

To Philemon our beloved *friend* and fellow laborer,

2 to the beloved Apphia, Archippus our fellow soldier, and to the church in your house:

3 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

4 I thank my God, making mention of you always in my prayers,

5 hearing of your love and faith which you have toward the Lord Jesus and toward all the saints,

6 that the sharing of your faith may become effective by the acknowledgment of every good thing which is in you in Christ Jesus.

7 For we have great joy and consolation in your love, because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed by you, brother.

8 Therefore, though I might be very bold in Christ to command you what is fitting,

9 *yet* for love's sake I rather appeal *to you*—being such a one as Paul, the aged, and now also a prisoner of Jesus Christ—

10 I appeal to you for my son Onesimus, whom I have begotten *while* in my chains,

11 who once was unprofitable to you, but now is profitable to you and to me.

12 I am sending him back. You therefore receive him, that is, my own heart,

13 whom I wished to keep with me, that on your behalf he might minister to me in my chains for the gospel.

- 14 But without your consent I wanted to do nothing, that your good deed might not be by compulsion, as it were, but voluntary.
- 15 For perhaps he departed for a while for this *purpose*, that you might receive him forever,
- 16 no longer as a slave but more than a slave—a beloved brother, especially to me but how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord.
- 17 If then you count me as a partner, receive him as *you would* me.
- 18 But if he has wronged you or owes anything, put that on my account.
- 19 I, Paul, am writing with my own hand. I will repay—not to mention to you that you owe me even your own self besides.
- 20 Yes, brother, let me have joy from you in the Lord; refresh my heart in the Lord.
- 21 Having confidence in your obedience, I write to you, knowing that you will do even more than I say.
- 22 But, meanwhile, also prepare a guest room for me, for I trust that through your prayers I shall be granted to you.
- 23 Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, greets you,
- 24 *as do* Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, Luke, my fellow laborers.
- 25 The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ *be* with your spirit. Amen.

Introduction

As we continue our conversation on the church being involved in the reentry process, we want to look at other Biblical references on this topic. We have studied the Gospel of Matthew chapter 25, Now we turn to a particular the Pauline epistle of Philemon.

The letter from Paul to Philemon is unique. It is not a letter dealing with a problem in a church. It is not instructional in its makeup. It is a letter of request. Here the great apostle writes to ask a favor, a favor that may change the direction of a friend's life. His request is that Philemon and the community "receive him". (vs 12)

I. Who is Philemon?

- Friend and Fellow-worker in the Gospel
- Led a church in his house
- Known for his love and hospitality toward the saints
- A slave owner
- The offended

II. Who is Onesimus?

- The offender
- A runaway slave
- One who is estranged from his community: Maybe an ex-con?
- A believer in Jesus Christ through the ministry of Paul
- A trusted ministry partner

III. The Request

- Take him back
- Receive him as more than a slave...a brother in Christ
- Restorative justice (“if he has wronged you or owes you...)
- Reconcile, then send him back to me

IV. Implications for us

- The need for advocacy. Ex-offenders need someone on their side
- The need for receptivity: Receive them (Let Them In!!!)
- The need to recognize true worth (children of God)
- The need to embody the restorative part of restorative justice

Bible Study Part 4

Jeremiah 38:1-13

Introduction

We have been studying about how God's people could be involved with those who are returning home from incarceration. We looked at some statistical evidence about those coming home in lesson 1. We studied the main scripture for this project, Matthew 25:31-46 in lesson 2. In lesson 3 we looked at reentry in the New Testament church through the Pauline epistle of Philemon. Now we turn our attention to an Old Testament passage where a concerned brother goes to see about a man who is suffering under the criminal justice system of his day. Our reference this morning is found in Jeremiah 38:1-13

Jeremiah in a Cistern

Now Shephatiah son of Mattan, Gedaliah son of Pashhur, Jehucal son of Shelemiah, and Pashhur son of Malkijah heard what Jeremiah had been telling the people. He had been saying, ²“This is what the LORD says: ‘Everyone who stays in Jerusalem will die from war, famine, or disease, but those who surrender to the Babylonians will live. Their reward will be life. They will live!’” ³The LORD also says: ‘The city of Jerusalem will certainly be handed over to the army of the king of Babylon, who will capture it.’ ”

⁴ So these officials went to the king and said, “Sir, this man must die! That kind of talk will undermine the morale of the few fighting men we have left, as well as that of all the people. This man is a traitor!”

⁵ King Zedekiah agreed. “All right,” he said. “Do as you like. I can’t stop you.”

⁶ So the officials took Jeremiah from his cell and lowered him by ropes into an empty cistern in the prison yard. It belonged to Malkijah, a member of the royal family. There was no water in the cistern, but there was a thick layer of mud at the bottom, and Jeremiah sank down into it.

⁷ But Ebed-melech the Ethiopian, an important court official, heard that Jeremiah was in the cistern. At that time the king was holding court at the Benjamin Gate, ⁸ so Ebed-melech rushed from the palace to speak with him. ⁹ “My lord the king,” he said, “these men have done a very evil thing in putting Jeremiah the prophet into the cistern. He will soon die of hunger, for almost all the bread in the city is gone.”

¹⁰ So the king told Ebed-melech, “Take thirty of my men with you, and pull Jeremiah out of the cistern before he dies.”

¹¹ So Ebed-melech took the men with him and went to a room in the palace beneath the treasury, where he found some old rags and discarded clothing. He carried these to the cistern and lowered them to Jeremiah on a rope. ¹² Ebed-melech called down to Jeremiah, “Put these rags under your armpits to protect you from the ropes.” Then when Jeremiah was ready, ¹³ they pulled him out. So Jeremiah was returned to the courtyard of the guard—the palace prison—where he remained.

I. A Good Man goes to Jail

- Preaching the truth
- Trying to save lives
- Branded a Traitor

II. A Good Man Condemned to death

- The Princes go to the king demanding the death penalty
- From the palace to the prison to solitary confinement
- Left to die in the mire

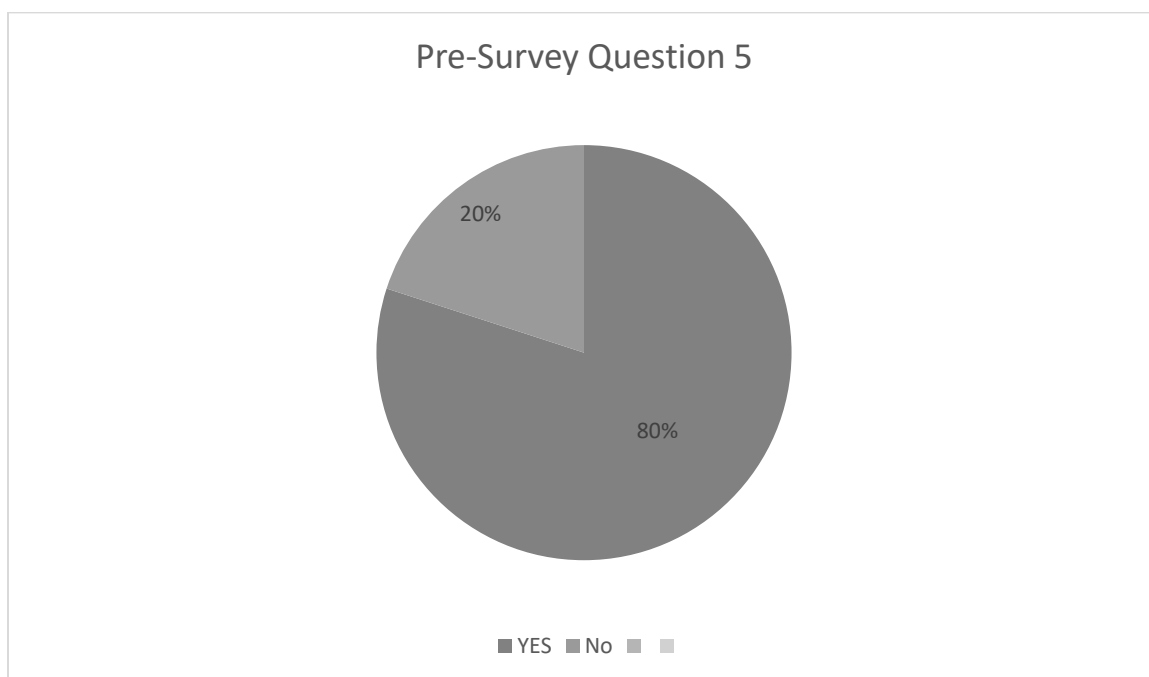
III. A Brother being a brother

- Ebed-melech the Cushite (Ethiopian) “servant of the king”
- Advocates for Jeremiah’s recovery
- Participates in Jeremiah’s recovery
- Is rewarded by God for Jeremiah’s recovery

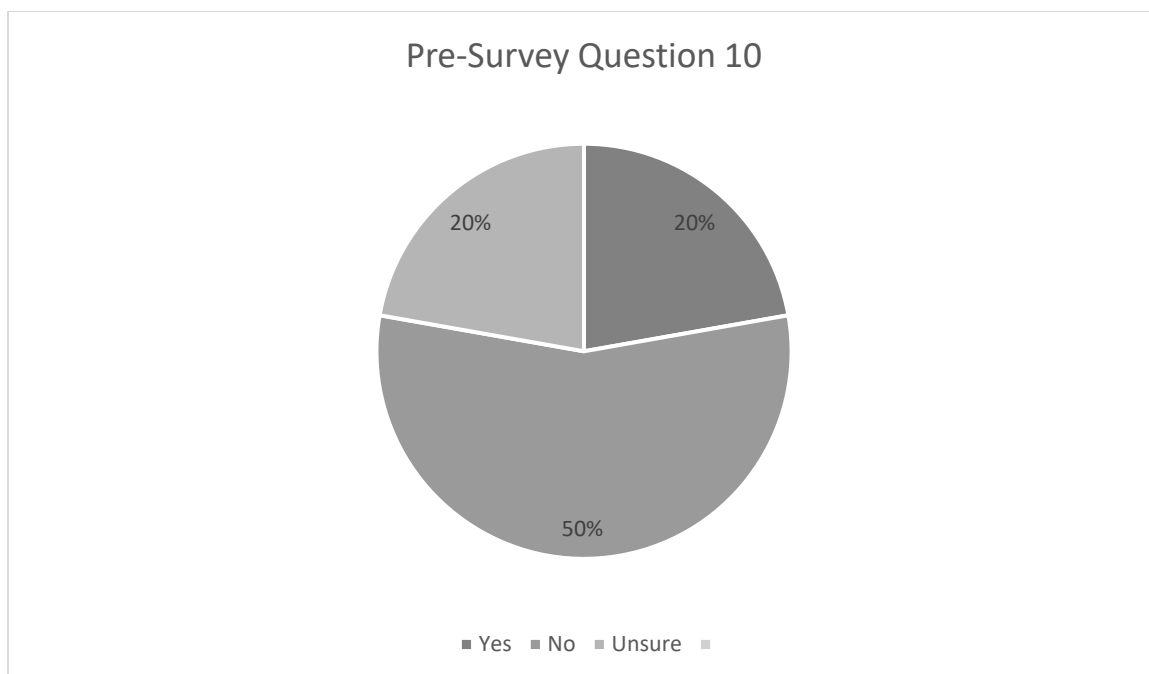
APPENDIX D

GRAPHS

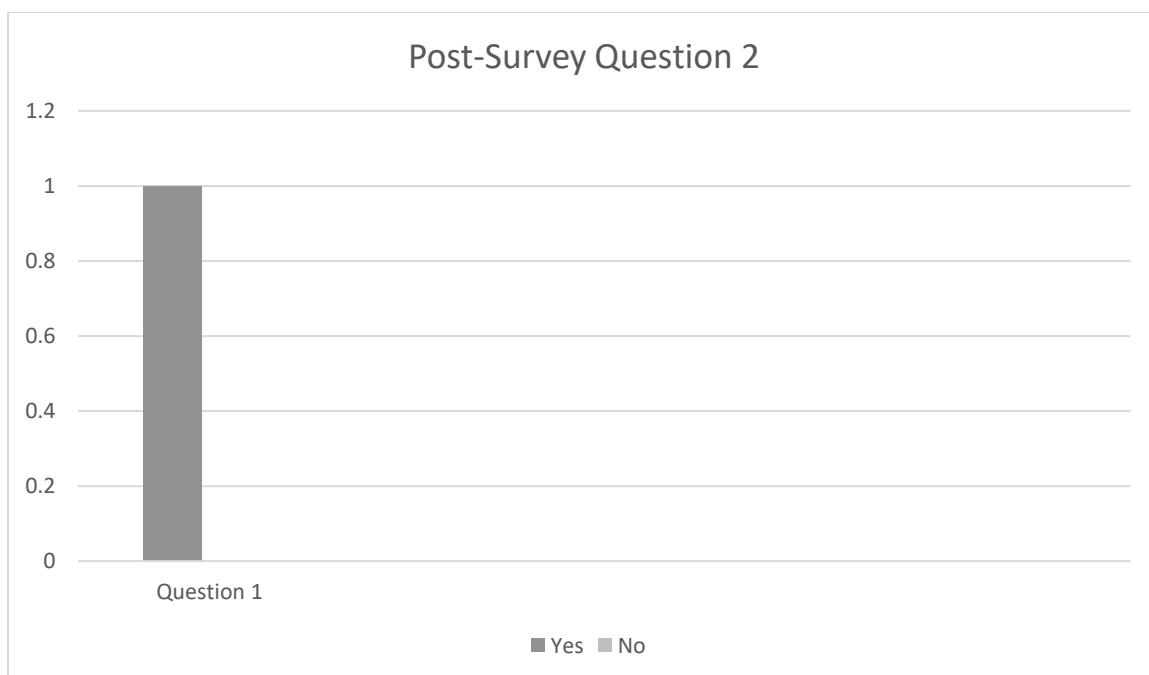
Survey Question Graphs



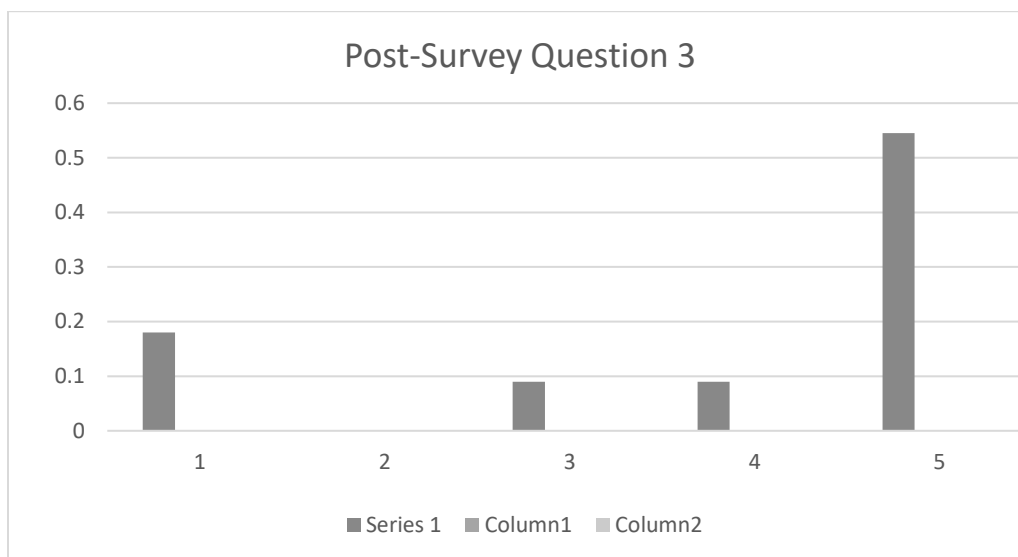
Pre-survey question 5: Have you or your church ministered to individuals who were going through incarceration?



Presurvey Question 10: Have you or your congregation actively sought out ex-offenders or their families to minister to on an ongoing basis? (more than one time per year)



Post-Survey Question 2: In the light of Matt, 25:31-46, do you see a need for the local congregation to get involved with reentry?



Post Survey Question 3: On a scale of 1-5, 1 being totally unwilling, and 5 being totally willing, how willing are you to engage with offenders returning to the Zanesville/Muskingum County area?

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